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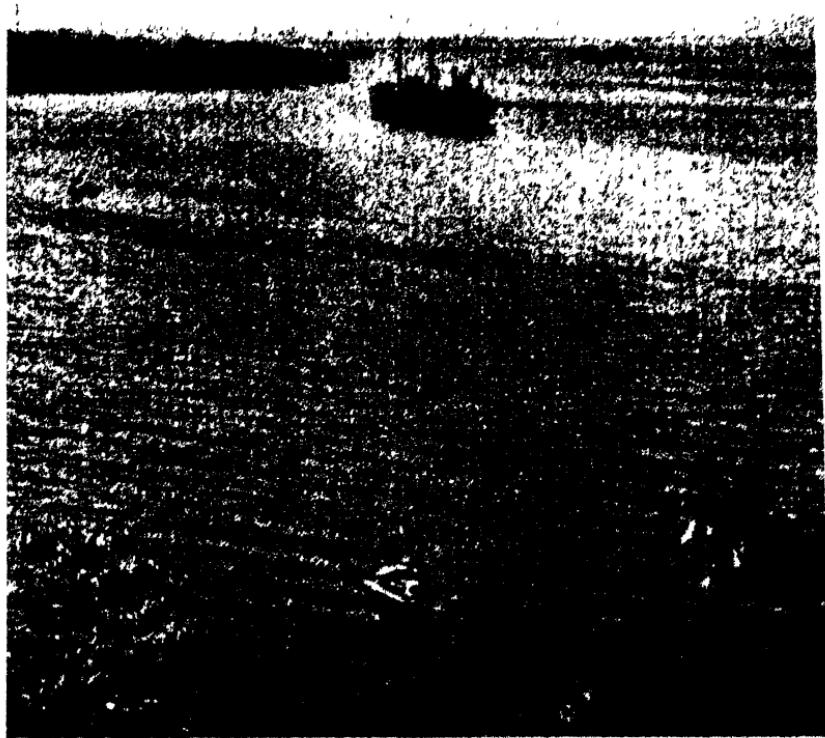




BLACK MARTINIQUE—RED GUIANA







FRANCE IN AMERICA  
The Harbor of Fort-de-France, Martinique

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# BLACK MARTINIQUE —RED GUIANA

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by

**N I C O L   S M I T H**

*Author of Burma Road and  
Bush Master*

**PHOTOGRAPHS BY**  
**LOREN TUTELL**

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*To*  
**MOTHER AND FATHER**



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PART I  
MARTINIQUE



## 1

## THE SNAKE PRIEST

"HEY!" I shouted. "I've landed the Snake Priest at last!"

But there was no answer.

"Loren!" I shouted impatiently. "Loren Tutell! Are you there?"

"Coming!"

Right behind the word came Loren. He is one of America's ace photographers in color. He emerged with a rush from the door of the Lido, the swankiest hotel in Martinique. It boasts seven bedrooms.

He came bounding down the steps of the long stone terrace where I stood waiting beside the taxi I had hired. He is a deceptively slender youth, hiding a tireless energy behind his apparent fragility. As usual, he was festooned with enough photographic paraphernalia—not to mention the heavy lunch basket—to burden a redcap twice his size. As usual, he was grinning.

"Yeah, I know you got him," he hailed me. "The maid told me."

"I was beginning to think I'd never get the message through," I said. "These darned telephones in Martinique work when they feel like it."

"Did you really get the priest on the phone?" Loren asked wonderingly, as we climbed into the taxi and started for the town of Fort-de-France, Martinique's capital, five miles from the beach hotel where we had found rooms.

My photographer pal was entitled to be incredulous. For the

past ten days we had been trying to reach the Snake Priest by telephone and for ten days we had been baffled. I had never seen the man. All that I knew about him was that he was the priest in charge of an orphanage farm situated many miles from Fort-de-France, high up in the mountains, in a remote place named Tracee. I had tried again and again to reach him by telephone, but the only answer I ever got from the operator was that Father Michel was not in Tracee.

"No," I said, answering Loren's question, "I didn't get him on the phone. I just tried another system. I saw a priest strolling along the street this morning. I stopped him, and asked if he could tell me where to find a certain priest who runs a farm for boys, up in the mountains, but who isn't there at all. It was as simple as that."

"Don't tell me you ran right smack into the Snake Priest himself!" exclaimed Loren.

"Well, practically. This priest I buttonholed without an introduction looked a wee bit startled, and then he made a stiff little bow. 'But, yes, I can tell you,' he said. 'I am the Abbé Heleine. You refer to Père Michel Triclot. He is one of my closest friends. He has just arrived in Fort-de-France for an emergency. I am even now on my way to join him.'"

"An emergency?" groaned Loren, interrupting me. "Is he going to have his appendix out, or something? Can you beat that for hard luck! We've got only one day left to go, and then our permit time runs out, and with this guy in the hospital we get no pictures of him or his farm or the fight, no nuthin'!"

"Keep your shirt on," I said. "You're away ahead of me. This emergency isn't surgical. It's just his monthly visit to town. The only operation is going to be on his car. I guess he's given it some rough going, up in the mountains."

## THE SNAKE PRIEST

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"He certainly gets around," murmured Loren. "He may not have been here for a month, but he's sure been in a lot of other places. You never could catch him in Tracee. Say, what sort of a place do you suppose this Tracee is, anyway? Must be sort of spooky, huh?"

"Oh, I don't know," I said. "What's spooky about an orphanage? We've got orphanages ourselves, and some of them are up in the mountains, too."

"Of course we have orphanages," said Loren. "But this is the first time I ever heard of one where all of the kids were either feeble-minded or criminal. Why, they tell me that one of those kids even committed a murder!"

"Oh, don't believe everything you hear," I said.

Loren suddenly began pawing thorough his photographic equipment. "Good Lord, where's my exposure meter?" he exclaimed.

"Don't ask me. How should I know? You've got enough stuff with you, right now, to start a camera shop."

But he went on rummaging through the cases heaped on the floor of the taxicab, and even gave a discouraged glance at the tripod case.

"It isn't here," he groaned. "We'll have to go back for it."

We had already covered two out of the seven kilometers that lie between the Lido and the city, but there was nothing else to do but to turn around. However, I'm grateful for that bit of forgetfulness. If it hadn't been for that, I should have missed the doubtful pleasure of observing the effects of a certain sort of European philosophy upon a child of seven.

Loren leaped from the taxi as soon as we reached our hotel. "Won't be a second!" he exclaimed as he raced up the terrace steps.

He had hardly vanished into the hotel when there appeared,

heading in my direction, one of the other guests. I knew him as Herr Baum. He professed to be a Jew, a refugee from Germany. With his wife and their small son, aged seven, he had been at the Lido for several weeks. They were among several hundred refugees from Germany, mostly Jewish, who had recently landed in Martinique, from which point they had expected to continue on to America. But there was a difference between most of these other refugees and Herr Baum. They had little or no money and were herded into a miserable tent colony. Herr Baum was one of the few apparently possessed of considerable means. And, unlike most of the others, he was not awaiting entry into the United States but into Mexico.

In appearance, he did not seem Jewish. He was tall, well over six feet, broad-shouldered, powerfully built, with the blue eyes of a blond Nordic. He had a soft, deliberate voice, was most convincing in his speech, was extremely amiable, and "had a way with him," whether with his family or with any chance acquaintance whom he might meet at the Lido bar. It was whispered about the hotel that Herr Baum had been an important figure in the Germany that preceded the rise of Adolf Hitler. He had suffered frightfully at the hands of the Gestapo, it was rumored, and members of his family had been spirited away to concentration camps or to fates even worse. Herr Baum did nothing to quiet these stories. In fact, by a nod here and a smile there, he not only gave them endorsement, but deepened our sympathy for him. His shrug and his smile seemed to say that these had been experiences so horrible they had best be forgotten. Cultured and clever, he had interested me from the first moment I met him. Yet at times one observed in his manner an oiliness and obsequiousness which somehow seemed put on like a cloak.

He came up to the taxi and rested his arm on the open win-

dow. "Are you off on another of your photographic jaunts, Mr. Smith?" he observed pleasantly.

"Yes," I answered, "at last we have landed the famous priest of Tracee. You know, the one who conducts that farm for unfortunate children. We hope to get some very unusual pictures."

"Ah, yes, I heard you speaking of him to *madame la patronne* the other night," he smiled. "You have been trying to reach him by telephone, have you not?"

There was only one telephone in the hotel, and it stood in the public hall. It was scarcely private.

"Yes," I answered, "and the fight has all been arranged. In two hours' time we shall be there."

"And who are to be the combatants?"

"A mongoose and a *trigonocephale*. The *trigonocephale* is a member of the bushmaster family, one of the deadliest of snakes. The priest is going to put the fight on for our special benefit, in an open pit. There won't be any lattice cage or wire netting that will hide the action from the camera. Of course, I know, photographs have been made of fights between cobras and mongooses in India, but I believe that this will be the first time such a battle has ever been filmed in the western hemisphere in full color."

Herr Baum's piercing blue eyes narrowed to small pinpoints. He had a trick of doing that, of closing them to a fraction of their natural size, when he forgot himself in concentration.

"My, that will be wonderful!" he breathed. "A great experience indeed! Mr. Smith, I have a favor to ask for my little boy. He has so few amusements. Will you not take him with you? I am sure it will be an experience he will remember as long as he lives."

Herr Baum's English was a little flowery, but he knew pretty well how to get what he wanted. I certainly didn't relish the

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Herr Baum's English was a little flowery, but he knew pretty well how to get what he wanted. I certainly didn't relish the

thought of acting as nursemaid to a seven-year-old at a combat between an infuriated serpent, one of the deadliest in the world, and a sharp-toothed mongoose, which, the priest had told me, had already survived two such battles.

"Don't you think he's a little young?" I demurred. "I don't like to assume the responsibility. He's really only a child."

"Ah, it is true that Raven is only seven, but he has been well trained. He knows how to look out for himself; he will not be in your way, that I promise."

"Okay, if the responsibility rests on you, I'll take him along," I said. "But we're leaving right now." Loren was already coming down the terrace as I spoke, the retrieved exposure meter swinging from around his neck.

"Raven! Raven!" Herr Baum called sharply. Raven materialized from behind a bush with amazing alacrity. "Mr. Smith will take you to see a fight between a poisonous snake and a mongoose! Run and get your luncheon!"

"But, oh, see here, Herr Baum!" I protested. "I don't believe we have time to wait while *madame la patronne* puts up a lunch for Raven. We have to get into Fort-de-France, pick up the priest, and drive all the way to Tracee. It's a good two-hour journey, you know, and if we are late the light won't be good. This is our last chance, for tomorrow I'm flying on to French Guiana."

"Oh, but Raven's lunch is already packed," Herr Baum interposed quickly, with what I thought was the ghost of a smirk.

"Already packed?" I exclaimed, somewhat startled. "Well, that's quick work!"

"Yes, is it not lucky?" Herr Baum purred. "When I heard that you had telephoned to order a picnic lunch put up, I thought it such a good idea that I ordered one for Raven and myself. I thought perhaps we would take a walk and picnic at Fonlaye, the fishing village."

Raven, who looked like a young gnome, had the speed of an antelope. Even before his father had finished speaking he had darted off and was back with a well-packed lunch basket. He climbed eagerly into the front seat, next to the driver. And for the third time that morning I was off to Fort-de-France.

There the two priests were waiting for us, at the home of a friend. Both were dressed in the usual ecclesiastical robes of black, though theirs were somewhat faded and dusty, and both were wearing white pith helmets, a necessity with which not even a cleric can dispense in hot climates. The Abbé Heleine was a smooth-shaven, ruddy and cherubic-faced gentleman in his early fifties, with sparkling black eyes that never missed a trick. His friend, the Snake Priest, Père Michel, to whom he now introduced us, had the head of a hairy forester. He was young, less than forty, I would say, and his bronzed face was fiercened by a huge mustache and a great, straggling, angry beard which jutted up and around the well-mellowed pipe at which he was constantly puffing. His gaze was gentle.

I looked at him with interest. What a strange servant of God this was, who alternated his care of the unfortunate children whom fate had maimed, physically and morally, with his hobby of capturing venomous reptiles!

"I have telephoned to Tracee," he assured me at once, "and the lay brother who assists me in ministering to our unhappy charges will arrange everything. The pit, I am sure, will be constructed to your liking."

"Do you really think it will be ready while the sunlight is still good?" I asked anxiously.

"Why not?" he replied calmly. "We have fifty boys, as well as two or three carpenters."

"Carpenters?" exclaimed Loren. "Is the pit to be made out of wood?"

"Yes, that is the lay brother's idea," said Father Michel. "You see, this must be staged differently from the fights that we have put on before."

"How did you handle them in the past?" Loren asked.

"Always in a cage. We are in the habit of transporting the cage to one or another of the great planters' villas for some special occasion or, again, we bring it into Fort-de-France for some special holiday or fete, such as the Fourteenth of July. It is very dangerous, you know, to let snakes as poisonous as these out into the open. So we shall construct a pit above ground, which will be well open to the sun, but so arranged that you shall be in no danger. You shall see."

The two priests took their seats with Loren in the back of the car, while I shifted to the front seat, with Raven and the driver. Raven sat between us.

"Who is the little boy?" asked Father Triclot, apparently noticing Junior in our midst for the first time.

"A youngster from our hotel," I replied, "a member of a refugee family. They are on their way to Mexico."

"*Bon jour, mon petit,*" the priest said. And Raven replied to this salutation in fluent and faultless French.

The jovial Abbé Heleine struck up a conversation, or attempted to, with Loren, although the Abbé's English vocabulary consisted of about twenty-five words. Loren's quota of French words was even more limited, and we all laughed uproariously at the result. Before coming to Martinique, the Abbé had been stationed for fifteen years in some of the wild gorilla country in Africa, in the Belgian Congo, where his nearest neighbor was more than a hundred miles away. He was still making up for lost time.

As we climbed higher and higher into the mountains the road became more and more precarious, but, staring at the scenery, I had

not noticed that the boy Raven was growing green. If I had watched him, it would have been obvious that he was going to be car-sick. Suddenly he spoke.

"Monsieur, I must sit by the window, in your place," he said firmly.

"Why, Raven?" I asked, startled.

"Because, monsieur," the boy replied with all the *sang-froid* of a man of fifty, "if I do not I shall vomit over you, and that would not be nice."

I agreed with him. I motioned to the driver to stop the car, and a change in our positions was quickly made. Raven soon felt better. He seemed to be just one more German boy who knew what he wanted and had been trained to get it.

Shortly thereafter we turned off the main road into a wretched dirt road, which, after a drive of a mile or two, brought us to Tracee. We had almost traversed the island. In the distance, only a few miles away, could be seen the incredibly blue expanse of the Caribbean. The district of Gros-Morne, in which Tracee is situated, is one of the most beautiful in Martinique. "The Farm," as the orphanage is simply called, nestled against the side of a hill. Its buildings were small, plain, but adequate. The main building, a long, rambling, two-story structure, housed the workrooms, the kitchens and the *salle à manger* on its ground floor. Upstairs were the living quarters of the director, Father Triclot, and his assistants. The lay brother, in charge during Père Michel's absence, greeted us as we stepped from the car.

"How are the arrangements going?" Father Michel asked immediately.

"We hope everything will be to your satisfaction," the brother replied. Loren Tutell scurried off immediately, to see. The responsibility of filming the battle rested on his shoulders.

The pit had been cleverly constructed. Close beside a small concrete storehouse, a shallow hole had been dug and in this a flooring of boards painted white had been built. The pit was securely fenced in with plank walls on three sides, the fourth being screened with double-mesh chicken-wire. The movies were to be taken from the flat roof of the storehouse, twelve feet above the pit floor, looking directly down upon the fight. Working with special lenses, Loren was convinced that within an hour's time the light would be absolutely right for the shots. The cameras were so arranged that all action between the combatants on the floor of the pit would come within focus, but nothing else would show.

"Everything all set, Loren?" I inquired. "Father Triclot says if you're finished we might as well have lunch."

"Everything's okay so long as it doesn't rain," said Loren as he climbed down the ladder from the roof. "Say, where are all these kids we've heard so much about? I don't see any."

"I just asked the lay brother that same question," I answered. "After they finished digging they all went to the shed where they eat. They're there now."

The two priests and the lay brother joined us. We strolled over to the main house. At its front door I noticed a rather large box cage, covered with burlap sacking.

"What's in there?" I asked, with my habitual nosiness.

"Oh, some more of Père Triclot's little pets," chuckled the Abbé.

"Manicou," said the lay brother briefly, removing the burlap and opening the box.

"What in the world is a manicou?" said I.

"It is what you call a marsupial," answered Father Michel, reaching into the cage and bringing out a strange little animal. It was about the size of a cat, with a long pointed head and a broad tail, all out of proportion to its body.

"Why, it looks like a midget kangaroo!" I exclaimed.

"It's not unlike one," the Snake Priest conceded. "It carries its young in a pouch and has an equally ridiculous appearance."

"It reminds me a little of that kangaroo mouse you have in California, Nicol," said Loren Tutell.

"California?" I exclaimed. "I wouldn't be surprised, California's got everything. I really think I ought to explore California, some day."

The lay brother reached into another section of the box and brought out several squirming mites, children of this queer-looking mother.

"Is the manicou native to Martinique?" I asked.

"Yes," Father Triclot replied, "they are indigenous to the island—not imported, as the mongoose is."

"Are they good to eat?"

Père Triclot nodded in assent, but the Abbé Heleine shook his head and made a wry face.

"Not to my palate," he said. "I tried one, once, and couldn't lose the taste of it for weeks."

The manicos were restored to their box and we proceeded to the luncheon table. Our hosts made it a jolly meal. When we again assembled around the pit, Father Triclot took off his black cassock and appeared in shorts, girded for quick action if it should prove necessary.

"You'd better climb up on the roof, next to your photographer," he suggested. "You'll have a better view."

"Me too!" exclaimed young Raven. But I objected.

"No, my young friend," I said firmly. "You'll get so excited you'll fall off the roof. I told your father I would not be responsible for you, but I shall not allow *that*."

Nothing daunted, Raven took up a vantage point at the far end of the pit, where he could watch the battle through the meshes

of the chicken wire. Three or four of the young orphans had already arrived on the scene, and soon ten or twelve more of them slowly and shyly approached. Dressed for the most part in shabby clothing, they stared enviously at the fine feathers of the little German boy. He ignored them, whether out of shyness or haughtiness I couldn't guess.

"Well," said Loren, "looks as if the fun's about to start. Here comes the lay brother with a box."

The lay brother brought the box to the side of the pit, and, opening a small gate in one of the wooden walls, placed the box against the opening and touched a spring which ~~threw~~ open the door of the box. Two mongooses scurried out and ran hither and thither around the floor of the pit, as if searching for their enemy. Their grace of motion was marvelous. They didn't run, they flowed. Slender, sinuous, rippling, they were almost themselves like serpents.

"Why have you put in two of them?" I shouted down to Father Triclot. "I thought you were going to use only one—the one that has already survived two battles."

"That's right," he returned. "But this second one has never been in a battle before. We want to find out whether or not he is a fighter, so we are putting him in here along with his friend, who we know will do the job."

"Don't all mongooses fight?" I asked in some surprise.

"Oh, no, indeed," said the Snake Priest. "They will, as a rule, but it is by no means unusual to find one which is—disinterested."

I thought of Ferdinand the Bull.

The mongooses were something over a foot in length, brown in color, with short, thick fur. They had alert, expectant faces, sharp pointed teeth, and bright little beady eyes that took in everything at a glance.

"They may be useful in killing off snakes around here," Loren observed, "but I'd hate to have them get into my chicken yard, if I had a chicken yard."

"You're quite right," I said. "And that's why the United States prohibits their importation. Look at that one there in the center! He must be the fighter. See how eager he is! And he's right, too—here comes the lay brother again and he's bringing the bushmaster."

The lay brother repeated the procedure, except that this time he was much more careful. He placed the box so tightly against the trap door of the pit that not a sheet of paper could have been slipped between them. Father Triclot, stripped to his shirt and shorts, and with a revolver in his right hand, stood guard beside the lay brother, ready to shoot instantly if the big snake should accidentally escape.

Raven had come so close to the wire netting that his nose was all but pressed against it.

"Get back!" shouted Father Triclot. "Don't come within a foot of that wire!"

Raven backed away. The orphans, who had approached as near as they dared, hovered just behind him. The Abbé Heleine had joined us on the roof.

"How many of these fights have you seen, Monsieur l' Abbé?" I inquired.

"Not one," he replied. "This one is my first. And, look, it is about to start!"

Like a prizefighter so eager to finish off his opponent that he runs into the ring before the starting gong has sounded, the fighter mongoose had already sensed the approach of the snake, though it had not yet been liberated. Running across the floor of the pit, the mongoose reared itself up on its hind feet and struck

at the trap door of the box which still concealed the snake. He was frantic with eagerness.

Father Triclot, himself an amateur photographer, called to the lay brother. "Do not pull the string yet," he commanded. "Wait till I get a pole and prod the mongoose over to the far side of the pit. If he should get at the bushmaster before he gets out of his box, the cameras won't be able to catch any of it."

A moment later the Snake Priest was back with the pole and with it pushed the mongoose to the opposite side of the floor. The younger mongoose seemed to have not the slightest notion of what was about to happen, and crouched unconcernedly in the far corner. The fighting mongoose quivered, poised like a living lance.

"Pull the spring!" shouted the Snake Priest.

The lay brother obeyed. The door flew open.

But nothing happened.

Out of the box there came not the slightest sign of the bushmaster.

For perhaps ten seconds—it seemed much longer—we waited, breathless. Then, slowly, almost majestically, the ugly, V-shaped, black velvety head of the sinister reptile became visible as the heavy body slithered forward out of the box.

At the entrance into the pit, the snake was holding its head at an elevation of some eight inches above the floor.

As it progressed farther toward the center of the arena, and when perhaps two and a half feet of its body had emerged from the box, it lifted its head even higher than this.

It was moving cautiously, almost hesitantly, and yet, I am sure, with a clear premonition of the deadly danger it was about to face.

How could it guess this? I do not know. I know that never in its whole life had it ever encountered a mongoose before this. How could it know with what it was threatened? Yet I am sure

that it was aware of its peril, knew that it must be a battle to the death.

Its wary lifted head, its slow advance, proclaimed this.

Père Triclot now took away the pole that held the mongoose back.

The mongoose sped toward the bushmaster like an arrow. The eye could scarcely follow him. He reared up. His head lifted toward the head of the snake, striving to reach it.

The reptile's head lifted higher, avoiding the other. It was poised an inch above that of the mongoose.

The angry forked tongue of the huge bushmaster flickered in an arc, over the head of its enemy. Yet it did not strike, but merely kept its head and throat at a safe distance from the attacker.

Though I had never witnessed such a combat before, it became quickly obvious that the mongoose considered it vital to plunge his teeth into the head or throat of the snake and regarded the rest of the snake's body as relatively unimportant.

More and more of the snake's body was coming into view. The black head and neck gave way to mottled markings not unlike those of the rattlesnake of the Rockies and the Southwestern plains.

The snake now began to lower its head upon its neck, while the lithe mongoose ran swiftly around him on all fours.

Then ensued the first real clash. The bushmaster's head shot forward and downward as he struck at the mongoose.

The animal was even quicker than that lightning thrust. Leaping to one side, he avoided the strike. Simultaneously, before the snake had had time to recoil, he leaped over the snake's body and attempted to seize the neck from behind.

He succeeded! A single crimson drop of blood appeared on the white painted floor.

The mongoose had won the first round.

The snake seemed dazed by this sudden thrust from his enemy, from this unexpected quarter, and apparently decided to remain motionless for a moment and gather its strength for a fresh attack.

The fighter scampered over to the other side of the pit, far out of reach of any unexpected lunge from the snake. He seemed content. Possibly he knew that the wound he had inflicted would weaken the snake, and was waiting for the bleeding to have its full effect.

It seemed like the pause between the first and second rounds.

Then I noticed that the snake was turning slowly toward the younger mongoose, which was hardly a foot away from him. This mongoose was not watching the snake, but had turned in the opposite direction, plainly interested in something outside the pit.

I glanced in the direction the mongoose was looking.

His attention was fixed upon the boy, Raven, who stood outside the screen, looking down at him.

The snake glided toward its unsuspecting victim.

Instinctively, I gave a shout of warning. "Look out, mongoose!" I cried.

Then I became conscious of a most extraordinary thing. I saw that Raven had realized the danger just as quickly as I had. But instead of trying to warn the little animal, as I had done, he was making himself an ally of the snake. He was holding the attention of the mongoose by making gestures, snapping his fingers, speaking soothingly to it—telling it, no doubt, that it had nothing to fear.

There was no time to intervene. In another moment the snake would strike. Therefore, it was not at the snake that I gazed any longer, but at the face of the boy. It wore an expression I cannot describe, and which I would rather forget, if I could. There were the faces of other children looking over his shoulder—the faces

of the backward children. Some of them had once stolen, from hunger. But I think their eyes were not shining with the same light that shone in his.

The snake struck the animal. So terrible was the poison that the little creature began at once to tremble in its death agonies. Raven, clapping his hands, screamed his delight in a steady flow of German. I heard Father Triclot exclaiming, "But I thought you were a little French boy, not German!"

Raven looked at him impatiently. "*Mais non, monsieur le père,*" he said unhesitatingly, in faultless French. "*Je suis un petit Belge, de Bruxelles.*"

The battle between the bushmaster and the fighting mongoose was now resumed. The bushmaster, perhaps lulled into a false sense of security by having so quickly disposed of one of its two opponents, now attempted to repeat the same tactics with the remaining mongoose. But this time it was a different story.

The mongoose, pretending that its attention was fastened upon another point, waited until the snake had glided almost up to him. Then, nimbly leaping to one side, he took the initiative in attack. He lunged upward at the evil head hovering above him.

It seemed as if the two darting heads met, mouth to mouth. They clung together, as though they kissed.

It was no kiss. The mongoose had plunged its teeth into the wide-stretched mouth of the snake, and, like lightning, had pulled out one of the inch-long poison fangs.

It was a movement so swift that only the eye of the camera caught it, and the miracle had occurred before we realized what had transpired.

Instantly shifting its attack, the mongoose plunged its terrible teeth into the clammy white scales of the snake's throat, and began to shake the five-foot reptile as a cat would shake a mouse.

It was all over in a few seconds. The bushmaster's writhings

grew slower and slower. The mongoose released its grip and glided away to watch it from a distance. He was like a victorious boxer, watching his beaten antagonist vainly striving to rise. The snake's motions ceased at last.

The mongoose had won its third victory.

Père Triclot pulled the dead reptile from the pit. Prying open its jaws, he showed us the bloody cavity from which the poison fang had been pulled out.

There was a moment's pause when all of us seemed to catch breath again. No one had anything to say.

I pulled myself together. "Well, Father Triclot," I managed to gasp, "won't you and the Abbé come back to the Lido with us and join us for dinner?"

I made Raven and Loren ride in the front seat on the return journey. I didn't want to listen to what Raven might say. And he couldn't talk to Loren.

Dinner that evening was a gay and delightful occasion. But as we were enjoying our cognac on the terrace, a scene occurred.

The Major was there. He was seated alone, two tables from ours. The Major was a Frenchman, one of the few who had managed to escape from France after the German invasion. He was a connection of the famous banking family of Rothschild. He seemed to have plenty of money. There were those who whispered that he drank to excess, but no one ever had occasion to doubt his patriotism. If he drank, I think it was only because, helpless to do anything for his country, he was eating his heart out.

Well, after dinner, some of the refugees from Germany had started to play a phonograph and to dance to a Viennese waltz. Prominent among them was Raven's father, Herr Baum, suave as ever. But for some obscure reason, possibly because of the distaste I had contracted toward a seven-year-old boy who had



First Blood

Last Round



The Bushmaster Kills One Mongoose



FATHER TRICLOT (left), ABBÉ HELEINE (center), and the LAY-BROTHER Father Triclot holds the mother manicou; the Lay-Brother holds the baby manicos



Part of Fort-de-France is built on the sides of the hills



The rolling hills of Fort-de-France shelter the finest of harbors

screamed with delight at the sufferings of a small animal, I had no further desire to talk to Herr Baum.

The first waltz ended and someone put another German waltz on the phonograph. It was then that the Major suddenly created the scene. Jumping up from his lonely chair, he strode to the phonograph, stopped it, yanked the record from the machine and broke it in his hands.

"How dare you dance while France is in mourning?" he shouted at the dancers, in a voice choked with anger. "How dare you make merry when you are the guests of an island colony of France that hides its grief behind closed walls?"

The dancers stopped, of course, in dismay. And the Major singled out Herr Baum as the particular object of his attack. He spoke to Baum in a voice too low for us to distinguish the words, but it was evident that he was telling the man what he thought of him, in no uncertain terms. Then, turning on his heel, he left the terrace.

Herr Baum, his eyes ablaze with a cold fury which he was unable to control, sank into a chair by my side, although I had not invited him to do so.

"Never did anyone in Germany treat me with such contempt as that Frenchman has treated me," he said hoarsely. "But the day has come! They will pay, all of them, for their insolence!"

"But," I protested, "didn't you leave Germany—at least, that is what I have been told—precisely because you and yours had been cruelly treated by the dictator and his Gestapo?"

Herr Baum did not reply. He rose silently from the table and left us. I shall never forget Loren's remark as he watched the retreating figure.

"Is there anyone interested in investigating the potential fifth-column activities of so-called refugee Germans on their way into Mexico?" he inquired.

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# 2

## SOMEWHAT WEST OF PARIS

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"Do you think it would be possible for me to see the Ambassador?" I asked desperately.

This was in Washington. It was the twentieth of April. I had been planning to leave by plane for Martinique within a week. And now, with the time growing short, here was I, cooling my heels in the chancellory of the French Embassy, and I was beginning to fear that I was about to bump my nose against a stone wall. No unofficial American traveler, I had been told, had been permitted to enter Martinique since the Germans seized France, almost a year before this. Figuratively speaking, Martinique was no more than a ferry-boat's ride from the United States' doorstep; but it was beginning to look as if it were as much of a forbidden country as Tibet.

An American couldn't visit Paris without Mr. Hitler's permission—did his authority reach out to cover the French colonies on this side of the Atlantic?

"I should really like to see the Ambassador for a moment," I repeated anxiously.

"May I ask the nature of your business?" countered the polite young secretary.

"Most certainly. Your Consulate in San Francisco has arranged for me to visit Martinique, but no permission has yet come through for the photographer whom I wish to accompany me."

"A photographer!" exclaimed the young secretary, putting on

his gravest expression. "A most unusual request! I really don't know whether a photographer may go to Martinique at this particular time. Just what *is* the nature of your business?"

"I go purely as a traveler," I assured him. "I have no political affiliations. I wish merely to make motion pictures—in color—of the native life in the island for my lecture tours. Surely this can be arranged?"

The young man wagged his head with profound doubtfulness, but excused himself and disappeared into an inner sanctum. I remained in the anteroom, on pins and needles. It was then that my good friend Baron James Baeyens happened to emerge from a side door on the way to his office on the second floor.

"Good heavens, Nicol!" he exclaimed as he caught sight of me, and came forward with outstretched hand, "what in the world are you doing here? I thought you were in California."

"Hello, James," I answered. "I landed here in Washington only this morning. I *thought* I was on my way to Martinique, but now I'm not so sure. I've got your Government's visa for myself, all right, but nothing has come through for my photographer. Do you think there's anybody to whom I could cable in Martinique who could help?"

"Well, well, we'll have to see what can be done," replied the towering young diplomat soothingly, in the same sort of voice that a Park Avenue specialist might use on a badly frightened patient. It had an immediately quieting effect, and I began to feel sure, for the first time in days, that the ball would now start to roll.

Just then the secretary returned with the hopeful news that a cable would be dispatched to Martinique's *Chef d'Etat*, and that all I could do in the meantime would be to sit tight and hope for the best. For the next five days cables went back and forth between Washington and Fort-de-France at a rate that made my

radio bill at the Embassy reach the proportions of a national debt. The French are a loquacious people, even in cables, but they are thorough; and when Martinique was sufficiently convinced of the innocence of my projected trip, permission was granted. My photographer—Loren Tutell—and I left Miami on the clipper plane for Fort-de-France right according to our schedule.

We left on a Thursday morning and spent that night in San Juan, Puerto Rico, America's most heavily fortified base in the Caribbean. The following day, shortly after noon, we reached Fort-de-France, capital of Martinique. Geographically, it is about halfway between San Juan and Trinidad, which is British. Politically, even Mr. Hitler would agree that it is somewhat west of Paris.

Fort-de-France, with its massive rolling green hills sheltering the finest harbor in the Lesser Antilles, reminded me considerably of my own San Francisco Bay area. Part of the town is built up on the sides of the hills, which in rhythmic undulations dip to the water's edge. Our flying boat swished across the sapphire blue water to come to rest in a landing place made by nature, one which could not have been improved upon by man. We were soon ashore, in a city of fifty thousand people, a city more closely affected by the conflict in Europe than any other city in the western hemisphere. A city whose inhabitants are all French in citizenship, but of which less than one in ten are of white, or partly white blood, and of which more than ninety per cent are Negro.

Black Martinique.

We had neglected to cable ahead for hotel accommodations. No one had warned us that it might be necessary. Our motion-picture equipment having safely passed through the customs inspection, and our luggage having been placed in the taxicab, we confidently told the driver to take us to the Hotel Lido.

"It's a few kilometers outside the city, isn't it?" I asked.

"Yes, m'sieu, about seven," the man replied. "And truly the most chic in all the island."

Past the Customs House, past the yellow stucco offices of the rum merchants on the water front, and over the bridge that crosses the canal we whirled, getting a fleeting glimpse of the long anchored French aircraft carrier, the *Bearn*, before we rounded the end of the hill beyond the city. Down to the edge of the blue sea once more, we passed dozens of little waterside villas, their garden walls bright with masses of bougainvillea—both the purple-flowered and the variety that in this fabulous land has a deep red color all its own. Like a true Frenchwoman, Martinique glowed with the beauty of her welcome.

In fifteen minutes we had reached the terrace of the tiny hotel and moved up, bag and baggage, into the dining room, which was also *madame la patronne's* reception room. The *bonne*, a fifteen-year-old Negro maid, with a face of ebony and eyes like agate marbles, told us that Madame was taking a siesta, but would receive us in a moment. In the meantime, would we care for some cold lemonade while we waited? We would, and we waited.

Madame entered—large, bosomy, floating in perfume, and charming to a degree. She loved Americans, she loved us, but she had only seven rooms. And these were all taken, by these so-pitiful refugees from Europe. Although they might leave, it was true, at any moment, on the French ship for New York—all, that is to say, except Herr Baum and his family, who were destined for Mexico, by way of Santo Domingo—nevertheless, at the moment, there just wasn't any room at all. She was desolated.

"Well, just when do they leave?" I persisted. "Tonight? Tomorrow? Or when?"

Madame fluttered her hands. "That I cannot tell you," she

said. "Their ship has been scheduled to depart every day now, for the past two weeks. But she does not leave."

"Don't tell me it will be another two weeks!" I ejaculated.

Madame, a true Frenchwoman, shrugged her billowy shoulders. A Frenchwoman, and therefore a philosopher.

"Who can tell, in these strange and unpredictable times?" she asked, complacently.

Our taxicab driver had remarked, on the way out, that rains might now be expected at any moment. This had made us rejoice that we were not booked at a hotel in the city. Much of Fort-de-France was built on low marshy ground, and I knew that during the rainy season it would be like any other tropical town—a steam bath. But now I turned to it in desperation.

"There are surely hotels in Fort-de-France," I said to madame. "We could stay at one of them until you have a vacancy here."

"Of course, of course," she replied brightly. "I shall ring up the Hôtel de la Paix immediately!"

But she returned from the telephone with an even more gloomy expression. "There is not a room to be had in the Hôtel de la Paix," she announced.

"And at the others?"

"Indeed, there is not a room, not a single vacancy, in all Martinique," madame confessed, with a tragic sadness that Sarah Bernhardt might have envied. "And what a pity, what a pity that is, when young gentlemen from America have always spent money with such magnificence!"

It was plain that madame remembered the good old days of the tourist ships, now seemingly gone forever.

"Never mind, madame," I said, more gaily than I felt, "if you can provide some mosquito netting and a sleeping bag, permit us to use your dining-room tables. I can be perfectly happy any-

where, as long as I'm lying down." Then I added: "You must have all the refugees in Europe over here!"

"Of a verity, m'sieu," she answered. "By the latest count, we do indeed have more than a thousand."

And from her tone of anguish I perceived that the addition of only a thousand persons had presented Martinique with a housing problem of catastrophic seriousness.

She clapped her hands. "I have an idea!" she exclaimed. "Come with me."

Loren and I followed meekly in her wake as she floated out upon the terrace and pointed to a fantastic little structure a short distance from the hotel. It resembled, more or less, a papier-mâché tower created in a nightmare for an overnight Hollywood production. Never before in the tropics, or anywhere, had I seen a building like it. It would have been a natural for a pirates' lair, or Set No. 13 in the weekly series of *The Perils of Pauline*.

"What is that atrocity?" I gasped.

"That? That is Jean-Marie-les-Bains. It belongs to an Armenian. He rents it to a Negro gentleman and his wife," she explained.

"Yes, but what is it?"

"On the ground floor," she said with dignity, "there is a species of café. Up above, perhaps you would say rooms to rent."

I ignored her implications. "Could you get in touch with the owner and find out if there are two vacant rooms to be had?" I asked.

"Most certainly! I shall send your taxi driver to find out. It is your last chance," she added, almost gaily.

Madame spoke rapidly to the driver, in an undertone, only a few words of which I caught, but I gathered that she was making a vigorous demand for the accommodations. Within a quarter of an

hour the man returned. We might have the rooms, for the equivalent of fifty cents a day. The Negro gentleman and his wife had agreed to vacate their own living quarters. For all we knew, they were going to sleep on the beach, at the edge of which the building stood. We snapped at it.

Madame was heartsick to inform us that there were no sheets on the beds, that none could be obtained, and that a cake of soap could not be purchased in Martinique for love or money. Neither were there any mosquito nets, but madame had a solution for that. She had some bridal-veil tulle, which might easily be converted into nets. Monsieur might spread out his kimono, if he had one, to serve as a sheet, and, with madame's home-made mosquito netting, he would be as comfortable as he would be at the finest hotel in Paris.

Moreover, monsieur must have all his meals with her, at the Lido. Madame's cuisine, she admitted sadly, was not so lavish as it had been before the war, but she had lobster and fruit, the finest in Martinique.

"Lobsters!" I yelled in delight. The following day, in town, I had two lobsters for luncheon, and two more for dinner that evening at madame's.

The day after that I broke out in a rash.

When Loren Tutell and I saw our rooms at Jean-Marie-les-Bains for the first time they seemed to us expensive even at fifty cents a day. Any flophouse south of Market Street in San Francisco could have offered better at half the price. There were no towels, sheets or comfortable chairs—just cots, with mattresses, and a couple of armoires, locked and useless to us, because they contained the personal effects of the black couple we had ousted. Nevertheless we felt as though we had captured the suite *de luxe*

at the Ritz. But Loren looked perplexedly at the heap of bridal veiling.

"How on earth are we going to hang this stuff up?" he demanded.

I was stumped. Madame had said that she hadn't a bit of cord in the place. All I could find was some twine from packages brought from New York. Pieced together, these scraps of string were still not long enough to extend across the room, by a good three feet. Then Loren showed a flash of genius.

"How many neckties have you got, Nicol?" he asked.

"Four, not counting my blue one with the red elephants on it," I said reluctantly.

"Well, that's five. How many handkerchiefs?"

"Oh, very few. I never have a cold in the tropics."

"All right, that ought to do it. Give 'em here."

"Say, how many neckties do *you* have, my fine friend?" I protested.

"Never wear 'em in the tropics," he replied, as he grabbed my pet elephant job.

Deaf to my wails, he knotted them all together and eventually we got the netting up, although I was betting it would collapse at any moment. When I climbed cautiously into my cot that night I looked up ruefully at my blue and red elephants; they would never march in even formation again, for they were hitched up in a beautiful square bow directly over my head.

Whoever it was that tagged the grandiose *les bains* to the nightmarish little building's name couldn't have been thinking of the one bath it possessed, the shower bath in the basement. It could be operated only by tugging lustily at an overhead pulley arrangement, while standing directly under the faucet, and then one was rewarded by a faint trickle of water. To reach it, one

walked ankle-deep through dirty sand which had covered the broken tiles—the remains of former splendor—to a depth of two inches. There was no place to dry one's self; in fact, there was no place even to hang a towel, if one had had a towel. I dried myself by dancing the Dance of the Seven Veils, with our mosquito netting.

But when we went outdoors, the cloudless blue sky and the incredibly beautiful blue sea made us forget our indoor discomforts. We laughed at a huge beach crab, busily digging himself a new home in the sand and throwing out the sand behind him with the speed of a steam shovel. Farther along we watched a party of native fishermen who were just returning, their boat heaped with fish, and who with shouts of laughter were now disputing over each man's share of the catch. The lazy lines of white surf, the gleaming colors of the fish, the dark-skinned fishermen made an unforgettable picture which might have been matched only in the South Seas. I had heard it said that unless the United States soon took over the island its poor would be facing starvation. Looking at these lusty fellows as they laughed and gesticulated over the division of the sea's bounty, there didn't seem much truth in that prophecy.

Quite another sort of need for American intervention may be felt by a different sort of black citizen of Martinique. His viewpoint was relayed to me by an American skipper who got it at first hand. As the captain was sitting at an outdoor café in Fort-de-France, a grinning Negro laborer shuffled up to his table.

"Boss," he said, "when is the U. S. gov'ment coming down here to take over this island?"

Somewhat startled, the captain asked him why he wanted to know.

"Because, boss, I sure wants to be like them black folks up in the Virgin Islands. They've got everything! Since the U. S. taken

over them islands, they is all on W. P. A. and every nigger's got his own Ford car. And that sure am heaven!"

The stroll along the beach whetted my appetite and I hurried in to my first breakfast at the Lido. I gobbled a huge dish of sliced bananas and drank a whole pitcherful of iced lemonade, for although it was only half-past eight in the morning the day was already hot. Madame inquired how I had rested. I told her the truth: it might have been better, but it might also have been worse.

"Ah, but you are lucky, m'sieu, that you are not in the big camp!" she said.

"What big camp?"

"The refugee camp that is on the other side of the bay, a couple of kilometers beyond Fort-de-France. There are hundreds of refugees in it, and there are not enough beds to go around; indeed, there isn't even enough water."

"Are they French refugees?" I asked.

"Of course not," said madame. "French people are not refugees in their own country. No, these are mostly Germans and riff-raff. They pay twenty-five francs a day for their food and lodging, such as it is. But those of them who can afford it go to the restaurants in Fort-de-France for their meals. It is all very unhappy. Martinique was never intended by the good Lord to have half the world unloaded on its doorstep."

"Tell me, what is the difference," I asked, "between the refugees at the camp and those who are guests here at the Lido? I don't mean, of course, the French major and his wife, but such people as Herr Baum and his family, or that young couple over there." And I drew her attention to a young German couple talking quietly together at a distant table.

"Oh, that young woman has a bad throat ailment," madame explained, "and the Baums' little boy was not well when they first

reached Martinique. If a refugee or one of his family is not well, a certificate may be obtained from a doctor and they may then go to a hotel—if, indeed, there are any rooms to be had. But as soon as they are recovered, then they must go to the camp."

"But you tell me that some of these people have been here for a long time."

Madame smiled. "Yes, is it not strange that their illnesses never seem to leave them until the day their ship is ready to sail?" she observed.

"Oh, by the way, madame," I said as I finished my breakfast, "I have some American money I must change into francs. Do you think the bank will be open by the time I get into town?"

Madame said that it would be, so I set off for Fort-de-France. On disembarking the previous day I had had to sign a paper declaring the amount of money I was bringing into the island. Cash, traveler's checks and letters of credit all had to be itemized, and the ordinarily simple process of converting traveler's checks into francs was, in Martinique, a complicated one, which entailed a wait of almost half an hour. At last a bundle of large bills, tissue-paper thin, was placed in my hands and I stepped out into the street and the sunshine, to my waiting taxi. As I reached the curb I was accosted by a stranger.

"Why do you sell your dollars to the bank for forty-two francs?" he demanded, "when you can get sixty from me?"

I gaped at the fellow. "Who the devil are you?" I countered.

"I am a German refugee on my way to the United States," he said quickly, as if he were repeating something he had learned like a parrot. "I must have dollars, with which to pay for my steamship passage, and for use on arrival. Here at the bank they will let one have only ten dollars, on departure. Now, you are a stranger here, yourself. How would you like to arrive in a foreign country with only ten dollars? Tell me, would you?"

"Where do you go, in the United States?" I asked.

"To St. Louis," he replied. "I have the necessary affidavit of support," he added glibly, "but I will need some more dollars for my passage money. Of course my friends in America would send me the money if I wrote to them, but I do not wish to wait that long. There is a ship leaving tomorrow."

I knew, of course, that there wasn't any ship leaving tomorrow. How often, during the next two weeks, I was to hear that same story! The ship was leaving at any minute, the steam was up, the passengers had packed their bags—all sheer fiction. Everybody wanted dollars. Once a Chinese approached me. I was surprised that *he* didn't call himself a German refugee. But all he wanted was to give me sixty francs for an American dollar, if my money was in ten-dollar bills, fives or ones; seventy-five francs to the dollar, if I had fifty-dollar bills; eighty francs to the dollar if I could give him American money in one-hundred-dollar bills. And if monsieur, by chance, had a one-thousand-dollar bill, why, he might practically name his own rate of exchange. A hundred francs, or more, for a single American dollar!

Of course I asked him to explain why the bigger the denomination of the bill the more anxious he was to get it, but he couldn't—or wouldn't—give me an answer. I didn't find out until later in the day.

I lunched that day with a Frenchman to whom I had a letter of introduction. He had another guest at the table, a man who had made frequent visits to the United States. He was more American than French. After luncheon, I dropped him off at his house, and on the way I told him of the manner in which everyone in Martinique seemed to be fighting to buy American money at any price.

"What's going on here?" I asked. "What's all this mysterious eagerness to buy dollars? Isn't that sort of thing forbidden by law?"

"Forbidden! I should say so!" he ejaculated. "My young friend, you might have got into serious trouble if you had given that German the money he wanted and been caught at it. Of course it's forbidden! Everything's forbidden, but what can they do about it? If the American tourist trade hadn't been shut off, people here would be making fortunes by speculating in American currency."

"Do you mean to say that if I had sold an American dollar bill to that fellow for sixty francs he would have been able to re-sell it somewhere for eighty?"

"Yes, and for much more than that. A dollar has been known to fetch as much as two hundred francs in Paris! You can see what a tidy profit that is."

"Then these buyers here aren't refugees at all, on their way to spend the money in America, but are bootlegging the stuff to Paris?"

"Of course! Don't you see? It isn't the French that desire your American money, it's the Germans. They'll pay anything to get the American dollars they want. After all, they can grab all the francs they need, in France, so the dollars don't cost them anything. And those dollars, sent through the right channels, will buy them machinery and God knows what else from your country."

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed. "What a racket! But why did that Chinese offer more and more francs according to the size of the bank note?"

"Oh, that's because the bigger the denomination the easier it is to carry a sizable sum secretly," my friend explained. "Sewn in a coat lining, or inside a shoe lining. The smaller the denomination, the bulkier bundle it makes. Why, it wasn't long ago that a cabin boy on one of the French ships that came in here managed to buy eleven thousand dollars in big United States bills—bought

'em right here in Fort-de-France, for eighty francs to the dollar—and started back with them sewn in his coat and all set to clean up an amount bigger than he could earn in years. But they caught him at Bordeaux with the stuff on him as he came off the ship."

"I'm glad to hear that there's eleven thousand, at least, that the Germans didn't get," I remarked.

"Don't be a fool," he answered cryptically.

"We have our refugee problem here in Martinique," he continued slowly, "but you will have a pretty little problem with some of them, yourselves, I predict. Thousands of your citizens have done a wonderful thing in giving affidavits of support to these people, to guarantee they won't become public charges. But, let me tell you, a lot of these refugees are in for a jolt. I have talked to many of them who have an utterly childlike conception of the United States and the wealth that is to be found lying around on the streets for anybody to pick up. For instance, the other day a refugee from Frankfort-am-Main said to me, 'How wonderful it will be to land in the United States and be in a free country, where everyone is equal, and where, if you need fifty cents, you can wash a car without losing any social position.' I didn't disillusion him."

"It seems rather ridiculous for any refugee to be worrying about social position," I observed, "after what he has suffered in Germany. I should think he would be glad that he's away from it, no matter what he may have had to abandon and leave behind."

"That's where you're wrong," said my companion. "If a certain way of living has been, to you, the only conceivable way of life for you, and that belief has been instilled in you from generation to generation, a few years of tangling with the German Gestapo won't cure you of it. Once you got the chance, you would revert to type and go right back to conducting yourself, if you could, as a superior being. Social equality my eye!"

"But there seems to be no end to the generosity of many of your Americans in helping these people. I know of one famous Hollywood actress, of Austrian birth, who has become guarantor for no less than fifty Jewish refugees. As the guarantor must put up several thousand dollars to provide each of them with an affidavit of support, you can see that she has tied up a very sizable fortune. After having done all that, she recently received an appeal for help from still one more family which wished to enter America. As this family had been friends of her own in Austria for generations, she wanted to help, but she had come to the end of her resources. Increasing taxes and a Hollywood salary that didn't expand were beginning to pinch. She was obliged to ask a Jewish friend to deposit stocks and bonds of his own, to the extent of twelve thousand dollars, in order to bring that particular family into the United States!

"I have been told that one immensely wealthy American Jewish financier and his relatives have guaranteed the support of a block of one thousand refugees. An enormous sum!"

"You speak as though all the refugees were Jewish," I observed.

"Oh, I don't say that at all," he replied. "There are many Gentiles among them, and Christian families in your country are helping them generously, too. But I can assure you of one thing: because of the nature of the events taking place in Europe during these unhappy years, most of the refugees are Jews. And then again, my friend, the Jews have helped their own wonderfully, throughout the ages, and this time, perhaps as never before, they are clinging to that custom. At any rate, I can tell you that here in Martinique a Jewish refugee gets his affidavit of support just about twice as quickly as any other."

As we drew up in front of his house, he invited me to dine with him that evening.

"I should like to, immensely," I replied, "but I've been invited to dine tonight with Monsieur le Commandant Benech, aide to Admiral Georges Robert."

"Ah, m'sieu, you are indeed fortunate! Commandant Benech is not only one of the best-informed men on the affairs of this island, he is also one of the most charming ever to have come to us from France. In his house, you will forget that we are three thousand miles west of Paris."

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## ON THE VALUE OF CLEAN LINEN

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"WHERE to, m'sieu?" asked my taxi driver politely as we started on again. He was obliged to repeat his question, as I was plunged in contemplation of what I had just been told about "refugees" who were, in reality, German agents.

"What?" I said. "Oh, yes, of course!" I suddenly remembered Loren Tutell, who had been patiently waiting for me in the bar of the Hôtel de la Paix. I named the hotel and told the driver to make haste.

"I'm sorry I'm late, Loren," I apologized. "You must have thought the car had broken down."

"Oh, no, I was just beginning to think that some voodoo doll had put a jinx on you," he chuckled.

"Where do we go from here?" I asked, ignoring his remark.

"I hear there's a very colorful section not far away," he replied. "Shall we give it the once-over?"

A ten-minute drive to the outskirts of the city brought us to an open-air market in a narrow picturesque street which was crowded with natives, men and women both, who were elbowing their way from stand to stand, jabbering their patois French as they dickered for fish and fruit and sweetmeats. It was grand pictorial "copy," and we set up the cameras immediately. Martinique was meriting her ancient title, "Pearl of the Antilles."

At first the throng paid us no particular attention, but suddenly a wild-eyed youth of nineteen or twenty, brown-skinned, a true

Martiniquais, came bursting toward us through the crowd, his face convulsed with fury.

"Who the devil are you?" he demanded as he confronted me.

Startled, I told him my name.

"Why, you're not even a Frenchman!" he foamed.

"No, I am an American," I replied mildly.

"Another American!" he gritted his teeth. "I know what you're here for—you're here to write articles for your filthy journals about our beautiful island and call it the 'stinking' Pearl of the Antilles! Well, we'll soon teach you something!"

I tried to assure him that I had nothing but admiration for Martinique, but he wouldn't listen. He had worked himself into a frenzy and began to harangue the crowd that had started to gather around us. He called on them to drive out these despicable "journalists." An angry murmur, unpleasant to hear, began to rise from the excitable spectators. On the market stands, all too close at hand, were any number of baskets heaped with ripe mangoes. I didn't know how soon that pulpy fruit might be hurled at us, even if nothing harder came our way. Loren and I dived into our taxi and beat a hasty retreat.

What lay behind this? I knew only too well. It was directly traceable to a single ill-considered article which had appeared, several months before this, in an American magazine of wide circulation. I had gone to Martinique thinking in my innocence that all West Indians love all Americans. Now, I had had my eyes opened. And the fault lay, not in the boy's hotheadedness, but at the feet of that sensation-seeking writer to whom the magazine had given an opportunity to offend a friendly but sensitive neighbor.

This was the only unpleasant experience in my entire stay. From Commandant Benech, who had welcomed me, down to the poorest black laborer in the sugar-cane fields, I was received invariably with courtesy and friendliness.

Commandant Benech was my host that evening. He was directly in charge, under Admiral Robert, of administering all the affairs of the island, and his official title was *Chef d'Etat Major*. Vichy had made Admiral Georges Robert the most important Frenchman in all that expanse of sea that lies between the western coast of France and the eastern coast of America. In this vast area, he was not only the ranking French naval officer but overlord of French Guiana, Guadeloupe and Martinique as well. He was answerable to no one except the government at Vichy. He was, to give him his full title, *Commandant en Chef les Forces Maritimes du Théâtre Atlantique Ouest, Haut Commissaire de l'Etat Français aux Antilles et en Guyane Française*. And Commandant Benech was the Admiral's representative in Martinique.

After the French Navy took over the administration of Martinique, the local officials lost authority.

The residence of Commandant Benech was in the fashionable quarter of the city, high up on Didier Hill, swept by the cool breezes that never descend to the steamy city below. Although I was five minutes late, I was the first guest to arrive. As I entered the drawing room my host stepped forward to greet me. Perhaps in his early forties, but of far more youthful appearance, he had a smiling welcome on his keen bronzed face. His hand was outstretched in greeting and we became friends at once.

"Madame Benech will be with us in a moment; she is saying good night to the children," he began. "And how do you like Martinique by this time?"

I smilingly recounted my experience in the market place.

"Well, well!" the Commandant exclaimed. "Then your first impression is not happy."

"On the contrary," I replied, "I am delighted with Martinique. I really didn't blame that youngster at all. It was an experience I

## *ON THE VALUE OF CLEAN LINEN*

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wouldn't have missed, although for a moment I thought I'd be the target for a lot of ripe mangoes."

The Commandant smiled. "Here is Madame Benech." Into the room swept a tall, dark-haired Frenchwoman of great charm. Soon the other guests began to appear, and the spacious rooms were filled with the hum of voices. A delightful buffet supper was served, in true French fashion. It was one of those warm still evenings that are the same the world over in the tropics, and the house was thrown open to allow for every possible breath of air. The huge windows opened on a garden and a road banked with all the blossoming profusion of tropical flowers.

Unable to conceal my admiration for the superb Louis XV furniture in the salon, I was so awkward as to exclaim to Madame Benech, "But such pieces as these are a surprise! Here in Martinique, so far from Paris—" Then, realizing my gaucherie, and with no little confusion, I added quickly: "This is a part of France, and I imagine all the great houses here are not very different from the châteaux of the Loire."

Madame politely ignored my first remark. "We are so seldom in France," she said lightly, "that we find we are happier if we have some of our own things around us, wherever we go. It means home."

She turned to chat with another guest. A young Frenchman standing near us—he was a writer who had been visiting the island for several months—overheard my remark and took up the conversation.

"Have you visited any of the great houses in Martinique, Mr. Smith?" he asked. "I mean of course those belonging to the Ten Families."

"No, I haven't," I confessed.

"Would you really expect to find in them Louis Quinze furni-

ture, and, let's say, paintings by Fragonard or Hubert-Robert, as you might in a French château?"

"Why, I don't know," I muttered. "I really hadn't thought about it much."

"Well, don't expect to find such things," he returned, "or you'll be disappointed. Look at these people here. The women are chic, many of them beautiful, and they all speak perfect French. Most of them are members of the Ten Families."

"What, exactly, are the Ten Families?" I asked.

"They are the ten, and only ten, individual families that own, control and divide Martinique among them," he answered. "The rest of the two hundred and forty thousand inhabitants do not count. These Ten Families—their founders, that is to say—came here from France two or three hundred years ago. The Ten Families are Creole. This term implies, in France, a French colonial family. But in Martinique there are not many among these Ten Families who are without at least a little of 'the blood of the country' in their veins. Look at them!"

"Well, that's hardly surprising," I said. "I have many friends in French Indo-China who are partly French, partly native."

"All of these families I speak of are very rich," he continued. "The poorest of the ten is rated at close to a hundred million francs, the richest at more than eight hundred millions. Say, roughly, twenty-five million dollars in your money. That's wealth, in any language."

"How did they acquire these fortunes?" I asked.

"Generations ago, the Ten Families began to intermarry. They all prospered, and today, among them, they own all the great industries of the island—all the production of rum, all the sugar-cane plantations, all the banana plantations, all the real estate, all the mercantile houses. In short, they own the entire island, lock,

stock and barrel, even including the volcano, Mont Pelée. The volcano is no asset, but they own it, along with everything else.

"In addition to their town houses in Fort-de-France, all the heads of these ten first families own magnificent villas, high in the hills or on the edge of this indolent sapphire sea, with fabulous gardens filled with orchids, frangipani and bougainvillea. Some of them whose estates are by the sea have even constructed huge bathing-slides, such as you would ordinarily find only at some great public aquatic park. Each of these lordly places is staffed with an army of servants, and life at any one of them would seem too beautiful ever to leave. And yet all these families persist in remaining in their big and stuffy houses in the city practically day in and day out. Although their country places may be no more than an hour's drive from town, they will go there, at most, only for week ends."

"You make the villa sound just like the West Indian equivalent of a provincial château in France," I observed.

"Ah, but they are not like that at all, monsieur," the young writer persisted. "Whatever the amount of money spent on these fabulous houses, scarcely one contains furniture that is either attractive or comfortable. The pictures on the walls are mostly stodgily Victorian, and framed with too much gilt. They are not what one would expect to find in such a dreamlike setting. No, it is not the house itself that makes a visit to one of these estates so memorable to the favored traveler, it is the unparalleled hospitality of the family!"

"Large as these mansions are, they fairly bulge with the family party when the week-end visit is made. Many of the great houses don't have bedrooms enough to accommodate the inter-related crew that must always be invited. And so some of them have built separate dormitories—one for the boys and one for the girls.

Sometimes fifty persons in a single family gather at luncheon or dinner, and then great planks which are always kept in readiness for just such an emergency are spread over the tables, so as to make room for all. You can imagine what the assemblage is like at special holidays! Amazing housefuls, these, an exuberance of living such as no other place on the globe can equal! Only a Balzac could do justice to these families, and that in ten volumes!

"With such a Gargantuan scale of living, one might imagine that even fabled incomes, such as those of these Ten Families, would be strained. But with the extraordinarily low cost of living in Martinique, and the light taxation which prevailed until this war began, they were able to preserve their fortunes intact with comparative ease. Indeed, this is the first country I have ever heard of where there are millionaires—I've met some of 'em—who could live and frequently did live on the income of their incomes!"

"Well, that shouldn't have been too difficult," I interposed, "when the average wage of the laborer is only from forty to sixty cents a day. I hear that the ladies are complaining because they are being forced to increase the pay of their cooks to four dollars a month. For instance, that young woman over there," I said, indicating a charming young matron dressed in cool green, "told me earlier this evening she didn't know what to expect next—with the war situation, servants' wages would probably rise to meteoric heights."

"That depends on what one calls meteoric heights," observed the young Frenchman, drily. "But you really must hear more about the Ten Families. They're priceless. Has anyone told you about their annual pilgrimages to France? No? Well, before this war made it impossible, the one luxury they permitted themselves was to go every year or two for a visit to France. Not just one or two members of the family, oh, no! Mamma and papa, grandma and

grandpa, all the children, all the grandchildren, all the cousins and all the aunts, yes, even some of the house servants, the whole troop would embark. Sometimes as many as fifty members of one family would book together, almost converting the ship into a private yacht, or a Noah's Ark, I don't know which. Ah, what voyages they must have been!" he sighed, as he paused.

"Upon their arrival in Paris," he went on, "the whole Creole family would go invariably to the same hotel, one near the Gare du Ouest, the same one where they had stayed on previous visits. Throughout their stay, they would consort with none but other Creole families, from Martinique or from elsewhere in the West Indies. Their Parisian holiday completed, on they would go to Vichy—it wasn't then a species of capital, you know—for 'the cure,' and then to Vittel, 'for the waters,' and finally set sail again for home. You see, they had bathed their souls, as well as their bodies, in France. Thus reborn, they went back eagerly to their beloved island.

"So you perceive that although their families had been families of importance for three hundred years—an unbroken tenure of aristocracy that makes many a noble family of France seem parvenu in comparison—they were passionately and amazingly unlike the French of the early twentieth century. Today, since Fort-de-France has been made the administrative capital of the French colonies in the western hemisphere, and French naval officials"—here he lowered his voice—"have been quartered upon Martinique en masse, the incoming naval officers have found themselves, doubtless to their joy but doubtless also to their perplexity, in a piece of Old France that has in some miraculous fashion escaped untouched either by Kaiser Wilhelm or by Adolf Hitler.

"The navy men, precipitated by no fault of their own into this island, domain of the Ten Families since time immemorial, are

infinitely more sophisticated than the Ten Families. There has never been any question of the Ten Families' loyalty to France, no question of their patriotism; they are, if that can be possible, even more loyal than the officers. But theirs is a loyalty to a country, whereas governments and policies may sometimes appear to them a little remote. To them, France meant always a three-cornered trip—their hotels in Paris, Vichy and Vittel. After that, their entire interest begins and ends with their island, their children, their families, their soil and what comes out of it, and the preservation of their fortunes."

"You mean that you are describing these people invited here tonight?" I asked.

"Most certainly! You see them, do you not? Is it any wonder that more than one of the French naval officers who are suddenly catapulted into this, the most physically beautiful of France's colonies, should find himself somewhat an 'outsider'? I make an exception to that," he added, "in our host of this evening."

"That is most interesting," I said. "But tell me, who will control Martinique if Vichy ever becomes a thing of the past?"

"Why, unless brute force rules tomorrow, it will be the Ten Families, of course! They always have, and they always will. The Decemvirate, and their children. . . . The name of the individual who may bob up doesn't matter. He will be either an Aubery, or a Janne, a Hayot or a Cottrell, or any other of the ten sacred family names. But behind that individual, whoever he may be, will always be the Ten Families of Martinique."

I myself met the head of one of these Ten Families only a few days later. The letter of introduction which I carried, addressed to M. René Cottrell, brought from M. Cottrell a cordial invitation to lunch with him at his mountain villa and to photograph his superb

gardens, among the most famous in Martinique. On the way there, Loren Tutell and I spent the morning in photographing scenes at the fishing village of Fonlaye. We had been lucky enough to catch not only the picturesque arrival of the fishermen with their boats and their haul, but also the ludicrous activity of the big digging crabs on the beach, whose furious excavating in the sand seemed to suggest them as the ideal builders of the subway, if Fort-de-France ever needs one. But in our haste to get from one scene to another, in the heat, we were somewhat wilted by the time we reached the Cottrell estate, and I, for one, was painfully conscious of my sodden shirt.

With delightful hospitality, Monsieur Cottrell, a man nearing sixty, had actually strolled to the entrance gates of his estate to welcome us. We sent our taxi on with the cameras to the house, and walked back with him, admiring the magnificent grounds. Loren murmured something about making pictures while the sun was high.

"Come, come, gentlemen," smiled our host. "We shall have luncheon first, and do our picture-taking later. One always works better when fed."

From the account of the Ten Families which the young Frenchman had given me at Madame Benech's reception, I had assumed that the heads of these families would be either pompous or shy and retiring. Monsieur Cottrell was neither. His manner was friendly and informal, and he seemed to me to be typical of the finest type of successful businessman, which, indeed, he was. I was later told that his friendliness to "outsiders" was the exception, rather than the rule.

As we sat down to a five-course luncheon that included such a *pâté* as I had never tasted outside of France, and rarely outside of Paris, I apologized to my host for my appearance.

“Why, what’s the matter with it?” he asked gaily.

“Well, sir,” I said, “having been racing through a fishing village all morning, like mad, this shirt of mine must look as though I had been wearing it for two weeks.”

He laughed. “Don’t give it a thought,” he said. “If it hadn’t been for a soiled shirt I wouldn’t be here today, myself.”

I wondered what he meant by this cryptic remark, but before I could ask him to explain it he had turned the conversation and the opportunity was lost. Luncheon over, we repaired to the gardens. Entering them was like entering a fairyland of color.

Acres and acres of purple, red and scarlet bougainvillea surrounded us, together with *alamanda*, whose strikingly yellow flowers achieve in Martinique a color not to be found elsewhere. Mingled with the flowers was huge yellow fruit, twice the size of the biggest of oranges; *cedra*, our host called it. White clerodendron, red tipped, rose in delicate spirals from square stone urns. Purple blossoms, long and slender, called *patria*. Enormous lizardlike leaves, the *calladium* of other countries. Orchids on bushes and orchids trailing from tree branches, in glorious profusion. Foxtails and still more bougainvillea added to the acres of riotous color. Gleaming white sculptures from France and antique statues from Italy were gaily interspersed among these endless companies and regiments of flowers. The afternoon grew late and still we had photographed not even a fraction of the incomparably beautiful display.

“I’m afraid we shall have to come back,” I said to Monsieur Cottrell, “that is, if you will permit us. The light is fading.”

“Come another time, by all means,” our host urged. “And now, let us jump into the car and drive down to my little villa at the beach. It is on your way back to the Lido.”

I translated his suggestion to Loren.

"Why, isn't this place his villa?" he exclaimed. "Has he got another one?"

"Apparently," I said. "But you know his main house is in Fort-de-France. He wants to take us to the beach. It's probably just a beach bungalow, but perhaps we can all go for a swim."

"Swell!" said Loren. "I brought my shorts along, and yours, too, just on the off chance. They're in the taxi."

Monsieur René Cottrell's "little" villa at the beach was immense. It was a vast, square, low building of brick, stone and orange tiles, spreading over a level terrace that overlooked the sea. On each of its four sides was a wire veranda, shaded by a roof of bright-colored tiles. From it, a path led down the rocky face of the cliff to a bathhouse built of concrete and a concrete causeway which extended over the water to a pier built upon rocks. The dock was used not only as a landing place for monsieur's yacht, but also sported diving platforms and a water toboggan big enough for Coney. It was all most luxurious.

After our swim, we returned to the villa and Monsieur Cottrell showed us through it. Its rooms were enormous.

"So this is what you call a 'little' week-end villa," I remarked. "Why, the place is big enough to house an army!"

"Ah, but you must know I have a large family," he replied, "and when they descend on me en masse I must have plenty of room. Sometimes thirty or forty of us, all members of my immediate family, sit down together in this dining room. But this, really, is nothing. You should see M'sieu Aubery's mansion in the country. That would be considered large, anywhere!"

As we thanked our host for the wonderful afternoon and prepared to depart, I could not resist asking the question that had been sticking in my mind for hours.

"Oh, M'sieu Cottrell," I blurred out, "you remarked at lunch-

eon that you yourself would never have been here today if it had not been for a certain soiled shirt. It's no use, I can't go until you tell me what you meant by that. Do you mind?"

Monsieur Cottrell laughed good-humoredly. "Oh, that!" he chuckled. "But you had better let me offer you another rum cocktail while I tell it. It's rather a long story."

When we had settled ourselves comfortably on the veranda and were gazing at the dreamlike blue sea stretched out before us, he began his story.

"That was a very long time ago," he said. "To be exact, I was wearing that shirt on Wednesday, the seventh of May, 1902."

"You have a remarkable memory for dates," I smiled.

"Not so remarkable," he replied, "when you hear what happened that day. What's more, I can tell you the very hour of the day. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. I had just received an invitation which pleased me very much. I was visiting at the home of my uncle, in St. Pierre. A very young lady, for whom I had conceived a romantic interest, was giving a supper party that evening. Although my invitation had arrived at the last moment I was delighted to receive it, for I knew that I had a rival and I had been plunged in gloom, fearing that I wasn't to be invited at all.

"I ran gaily upstairs, to lay out my clothes for the occasion. I must look my best, for I had only two more days to spend in St. Pierre, and then, I knew, I must return to Fort-de-France to my own family. It was lucky that I had a fresh linen suit. I had been saving it hopefully for just such an event. I opened the armoire to pick out a clean shirt which would go with the suit, and, to my horror, I discovered that there wasn't a single such garment in the entire chest! The laundress had neglected her duties.

"It must be admitted that laundresses had indeed been busy

during the preceding three days, there in St. Pierre. Since the Monday, the fifth of May, there had been annoying activity on the part of Mont Pelée, the sleeping volcano that towered over the quaint little city on the edge of the bay. For fifty years this slumbering giant had bothered nobody, and no one dreamed that he would ever awake. But for these past three days he had been a nuisance. Smoke had poured from his nose and had fallen all over the town. Volcanic ash had seeped into everything, into our eyes and noses. It had been impossible to keep clean. I was down to my last shirt, the one I had on my back, and as I had been wearing it since the preceding evening it was already as besmudged as a coal miner's.

"I rushed down the stairs again, like a comet, heading for the servants' quarters. 'Marguerite! Marguerite!' I shouted. 'Where are my fresh shirts? I am going to a very special party tonight. It is to be given by Mademoiselle M——!'

"Marguerite was an old retainer. She had been with my aunt and uncle ever since I could remember, and she thought she could boss me as she had when I was a child. She always spoke her own mind. Now she replied:

"'Get along with you, Master René! If you are going to any party this evening you will wear the shirt you have on. I've already done three washings in two days and before I can get them dry they are dirty again. Wear the one you have on.'

"'But I *can't* go in this one!' I shouted. 'I've had it on for the past twenty-four hours! Don't you understand, Marguerite? This is probably the most important evening of my life, and I've simply got to have a clean shirt!'

"Marguerite shrugged her shoulders. 'If you don't go in that one, Master René,' she said, 'then you'll not be going at all.' And she turned her back on me

"And I didn't go. You know how a youngster feels, at that age. I would rather have died than present myself before my adored one in anything but immaculate linen. In a childish rage I rushed angrily out of the laundress' domain, back to my bedroom, packed my bag, and was off on the four o'clock boat for Fort-de-France. It seemed as though I had encountered the tragedy of my life, my whole world had collapsed around my ears, and I was so sorry for myself that I was ready to burst into tears."

"Well, but M'sieu Cottrell," I interrupted with a smile, "why in the world didn't you go down to St. Pierre and buy yourself a fresh shirt?"

"I couldn't," my host confessed. "I was, as I have said, very young, and what you Americans call it, broke. I had already spent my allowance, had nothing in my pockets except my return ticket, and I was far too proud to borrow from my uncle. Recollect, this was forty years ago.

"As you know," he went on, "the distance from St. Pierre to Fort-de-France is less than thirty miles by water, but by boat, forty years ago, the trip took several hours. It was late in the evening when I arrived at home. My mother and father had gone out, and I went sulkily to bed in my own room. When I awoke the following morning it was to learn that a good part of my little world had in reality come to an end.

"At eight o'clock that morning, while I was still asleep, Mont Pelée had erupted. The thirty thousand people who had lived in St. Pierre and on the slopes of the supposedly harmless mountain had all been snuffed out of existence in the twinkling of an eye. The adorable girl whom I had hoped to marry, my uncle, and Marguerite—all, all were gone. Buried alive or smothered by the poisonous fumes before they had time to escape. . . .

"The awful tragedy had been reported to my father on the

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telephone by the postmaster of Fort-de-France, just as I came downstairs to breakfast. The postmaster had been talking to his colleague in St. Pierre, an hour before, when the eruption occurred. He had heard the great crash, received a severe electric shock, and then—silence! His friend had died without being able to utter one word.

“And I—I owed my life to a piece of soiled linen.”

After the silence which followed the conclusion of his story, I shook my head.

“It’s an amazing story!” I exclaimed. “But, if you will permit me, m’sieu, it was not the shirt that saved your life. It was your own pride. If your personal appearance had been a matter of indifference to you, you would have gone to the party as you were, am I not right? There is something to be said for pride, after all!”

Monsieur Cottrell’s gaze wandered reflectively over the dreaming blue sea. Perhaps he was thinking of the serenity the years had brought him.

“You may be right, my friend,” he murmured. “After all, it was impossible to wear that shirt.”

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## MADAMEMOISSELLE ADRIENNE

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WHY do I remember Ste. Anne above all the other romantic and beautiful spots I visited in Martinique? During the weeks I spent on the island we went from one end of it to the other—it is only fifty miles long—and saw the grass-grown ruins of St. Pierre, the forest-covered heights of the Morne-Rouge, the green slopes of Trinité and Gros-Morne, the many picturesque little coves opening into the Bay of Fort-de-France, and gem-flashing Rocher du Diamant; all of these, and more, we visited. But the place I best remember is a lovely hilltop above the little village of Ste. Anne. It was there that I was told the story of the most pitiful of lovers, the innocent and luckless Mademoiselle Adrienne.

Ste. Anne is the southernmost town on the island, and the most difficult to reach—difficult because for a good part of the distance road signs are non-existent and the proper turning to take is a matter of sheer guessing. Several days before this expedition we had succeeded in finding rooms at the Lido, since some of the refugees had at last departed; but when we told *madame la patronne* that we intended to spend the day at Ste. Anne and asked her to provide a picnic lunch for us, she replied that there was no necessity for it. "There is a small hotel in Ste. Anne," she said, "which can provide you with an excellent luncheon, one you will enjoy better than cold sandwiches. Perhaps you will even like it so well that you will not return to the Lido!"

It has always amused me to trace the chain of trivial incidents

which brings about a totally unexpected conclusion. If madame had not refused to put up a luncheon for us, we should never have gone to the little hotel in Ste. Anne; if the luncheon there had pleased us, we should never have quarreled about its price; if we had not protested vigorously about the exorbitant bill, we should never have been overheard by the gentle old priest who was seated at the next table; and if we had never met the priest we should never have heard the story of Mademoiselle Adrienne. These are trivial links, joining each other by sheerest accident. But the tragedy of Mademoiselle Adrienne was also brought about by an accidental sequence of events, none of which, taken by itself, would have had weight enough to crush even her flowerlike fragility.

The drive to Ste. Anne took us over roads which wound through vast plantations of sugar cane, superbly fertile country. Many an acre of fresh land was being plowed in preparation for new plantings. The huge oxen moving patiently back and forth over the clean chocolate-colored earth played their part in forming a scene of undisturbed tranquillity that has known no change in three hundred years.

The luncheon at the little hotel in Ste. Anne was not only twice as costly as any other we had had on the island, it was meager and poorly served. We complained, and were answered by the *patronne's* cries to the effect that her meals had been good enough for two of America's greatest painters. What was good enough for them must surely be good enough for us. I asked her to name them, promising myself that I would find that their art had been affected by indigestion, but madame had either forgotten their names or had invented these easily satisfied visitors on the spur of the moment. She only screamed the louder. I don't know what we should have done, had it not been for the kindly inter-

vention of a white-haired old priest who had been quietly sipping his glass of wine at a near-by table.

"Can I be of any service, m'sieu's?" he inquired courteously. Then, having taken in the situation at a glance, he added: "Ah, it is Madame and *l'addition*, is it not?"

"You are right, Father," I replied, rising to return his bow. "This bill is out of all proportion to the service rendered."

The benevolent old fellow quickly and soothingly induced madame to lower her ruffled feathers and the amount of the bill, and we invited our champion to join us in *une fine*. Our photographic equipment interested him. He himself, he confessed, was an amateur of the art. He exclaimed, with childlike admiration, over Loren's multiplex accessories for the cameras, and when our liqueurs were finished he asked if he might not accompany us and watch Loren at work. When we had wandered along the main street of the little town until we had reached the church in the palm-shaded public square our kindly guide pointed to a curving stairway of stone which led upward from the end of the street to the crest of a steep hillock overhanging the church. At intervals along this precipitous flight of steps were small shrines, the fourteen stations of prayer; and on the crest of the hill was an exquisite little chapel, built of snow-white stone, edged with rosy coral. Above the chapel towered a huge hibiscus tree, its blossoms flaming red.

"That," said the old priest, as he drew our attention to the chapel, "is what we call the Chapel of the Red Hibiscus. The view to be had from the Shrine is one of the finest in all Martinique."

"We ought to get some wonderful shots up there," said Loren, craning his neck.

"All right, if you carry the cameras," I said generously. "It looks like mighty steep going to me."

We were out of breath by the time we reached the summit. The shade of the giant hibiscus tree, a landmark to all the parish of Ste. Anne, was welcome.

"This must be the spot that madame's two painters enjoyed the most," I exclaimed, as the heavenly beauty of the green hills and blue sea unfolded before us. "I've never seen anything more exquisite!"

The aged priest smiled. "Yes, yes, there is color here!" he agreed. "Though I have looked upon it daily for a half a century, I never tire of it. But I need no painting to call it to mind. Even if I were to be exiled from it, I should see it still. Nothing can ever erase it from my memory."

He was silent for a moment, as together we looked out over the divinely beautiful mating of the land and the sea.

"There was yet another American painter here," he murmured, almost as if speaking to himself. "Ah, these many long years ago! But he, too, would need no picture to remind him of this place."

"Did you know him?" I asked idly.

Loren had wandered off to see what other vantage points he could find, from which to catch the roof tops of the quaint town below us. I was in no hurry to follow.

"Only slightly," the priest answered. "And yet, in a sense, I suppose I knew him better than any other living person. Except, that is to say, old Colette."

"And who was she?" I asked. I had no desire to stir from this serene resting place. My eyes drank in the beauty of the scene spread out before me, while the gentle murmur of the priest's words only added to its peace. Far out at sea, huge Diamond Rock flashed like a jewel. Below us, Ste. Anne slept peacefully in the afternoon sunshine. I listened to a story that seemed like the

petals of rose leaves taken from a long unopened place of concealment—fragile, delicate, breathing its faint perfume before falling into dust.

This was the story. The venerable priest is speaking:

Let me tell you of Colette. Colette was *une fille-de-couleur*, a servant in the household of the De Jaunville family, once the greatest of the families in this parish of Ste. Anne. Extensive were their plantations, but, alas! there is now no one of that name left in all this land. It was an aristocratic family. So much so that although the Josephine Beauharnais who married the Emperor, the first Napoleon, was a connection, the family were inclined to the view that the marriage had not increased the dignity of their name.

Colette enjoyed an unusual position in the De Jaunville family. She had been maid to young Madame de Jaunville before madame's only child, Adrienne, was born. She was then entrusted with acting as nurse to the baby girl. As the child grew older and became a young lady of seventeen, she remained as her personal maid. Indeed, although she was an octoroon, Colette was more than a servant; she was virtually her youthful mistress' companion.

Colette saw the young American painter on numerous occasions, but he never gave me an opportunity to converse with him save once. I had often seen him, of course, starting off with his palette and paintbox under his arm for a day of work in the surrounding countryside. But we had never been formally introduced.

On a day near the end of June, when the flowers are most beautiful in this island, I went for a walk through the hills. Everywhere in the air there was the joy of living, the fragrance

of freshly blooming flowers. I walked far. In those days, m'sieu, I was not as I am now!

As I reached the top of a slight hill I saw, directly below me, the young artist. He was seated in front of his easel and was absorbed in bestowing the final strokes of the brush upon a landscape nearly completed. He had not even heard my footsteps. I watched him, fascinated. I was almost afraid to breathe, lest I should disturb him and interrupt the flow of his brush.

Then, because my ears are sharply sensitive, some moments before he became aware of them I heard the sound of voices. I remained where I was, unseen, curious to know who else could have penetrated to this lonely spot. His landscape was nearing perfection; but it was a living perfection that was to burst so suddenly upon this sylvan retreat.

The voices materialized into Mam'selle de Jaunville and her inseparable companion, old Colette. It was thus that the young French girl and the young American came face to face for the first time. He looked up, startled by this interruption. Mam'selle Adrienne's glance took in the painting on the easel, and, undoubtedly, also the handsome figure of the tall young man. He leaped to his feet.

"Pardon me, m'sieu," she said demurely, "for my intrusion on your privacy."

"Oh, but no, mam'selle, it must be I who have trespassed upon your estate," he stammered, a wave of color flooding his handsome face.

"No, no, have no fear of that," mam'selle assured him. "My father's property is some distance from here. I am just out for a walk with my maid, Colette. When the blossoms are so beautiful, as they are now, I cannot resist strolling among them, and I find myself farther and farther from home." She spoke with the charm-

ing trustfulness of a child. "But come, m'sieu, do not let me interrupt you. Is it permitted that I may see what you are painting?"

"Most certainly, mam'selle!" the artist exclaimed, gallantly. "Truly it is nothing."

She stepped lightly to his side and gazed at his work with admiration, clasping her slender fingers in childlike joy and exclaiming: "Ah, but it is beautiful! You must be a very great artist!"

"Oh, no, mam'selle, that I am not," he protested in boyish embarrassment. "Perhaps I might become one," he added breathlessly, "if I could paint a portrait—of you!"

"Oh, m'sieu!" she sighed, as she lowered her eyes demurely. "You are a flatterer."

"On the contrary, mam'selle, I am a realist," insisted the young man. "I know beauty when I see it."

And with a flourish he ripped the landscape from the easel and put a fresh canvas in its place.

It was then that old Colette found her tongue for the first time. "Mam'selle Adrienne, have you taken leave of your senses?" she cried. "What would your papa say? A picture by a strange young man, away out here in the woods? Come, come, it is time we went home! We have walked too far. My poor old feet will be so tired that I shall not be able to stir out of the house tomorrow."

Mam'selle Adrienne smiled indulgently and replied gaily, "Now, now, Colette, you know very well that I have always wanted my portrait done, and I shall never again have such an opportunity as this! I know I shall never have another chance. I am getting so old," she added, with a dainty pout.

"Very well," Colette conceded grudgingly. "But if you must have your way, the portrait cannot be painted here. You must choose a setting in your own garden."

"No, no, but I know what I shall do!" Adrienne ran on in her happy fashion. "I shall be painted in the most beautiful place in all Martinique! That is, if m'sieu is serious," she concluded, glancing up eagerly into the eyes of the young man who, so tall and attentive, returned her gaze with ardor.

"Ah, mam'selle, you do not know how serious I am!" he exclaimed. "Never in my life have I been more serious!" Then he added, making each word an avowal of his earnestness: "Any spot that mam'selle chose would be the most beautiful in Martinique. Tell me quickly, where is this lovely place?"

"By the white chapel under the flaming hibiscus tree," she replied. "Above the Fourteenth Station of the Cross . . . you know it, do you not?" Then, turning to Colette, she demanded coaxingly, "Surely you do not object to that place, Colette?"

Colette grumbled, but made no further objection.

"Tomorrow, then, at two?" asked the painter triumphantly.

"Yes, at the hour of siesta, when all Ste. Anne is sleeping."

They saw only each other. In that one moment they seemed to be in a world apart, a world in which only they two existed.

Then old Colette broke the spell.

"I don't know what your father is going to say to all this," she muttered crossly, adding, doubtless to ease her own conscience, that Adrienne must linger no longer.

With a gay little wave of the hand, Adrienne was gone, tripping down the woodland pathway in her filmy white frock and wide-brimmed hat. Behind her, in severe contrast, hobbled Colette, a withered gnarled figure in voluminous black moire, her turbaned head held erect and grim.

Several days passed before I again saw them. I had climbed to the Chapel of the Flaming Hibiscus, where I had just performed some minor ecclesiastical duty, when I heard gay young laughter filtering through the open window. Going to the chapel door I

peered out. There, only a short distance away, in the shadow of this very hibiscus tree, where we are sitting now, were Mam'selle Adrienne and the young painter. A few feet away, on the uppermost stone step of the Fourteenth Station, sat the wizened form of the ever-watchful Colette. In the brief time that had passed since I had last seen them, the two young people had plainly become fast friends. He was painting now in oils, and from the advanced state of the canvas before him I judged that she had been sitting for him several times.

Never have I seen a vision so lovely. Still in white, as on the occasion of their first meeting, Adrienne sat on a low bench shaded by the hibiscus, which flamed above her like fire in the brilliant sun. One of its scarlet blossoms nestled in her raven-black hair. The young painter had spoken wisely: the beauty of the landscape which surrounded her was of no importance. Forgotten, it faded into nothingness; for upon her alone his soul was centered.

Often, during the eight or nine weeks which followed, while I was away from Ste. Anne on a journey of mercy to another part of the island, I found myself thinking of the two young people. When I at last returned to this little chapel on the hilltop, the bench beneath the hibiscus tree was deserted as I passed by it and entered the chapel door. However, I had not yet finished my indoors 'duties when I heard and recognized their voices as they passed by.

"Do you realize, my sweet," he was saying, "that this is the first time, except that once, when we have been alone together? The memory of those moments will burn in my heart eternally! And you, Adrienne?"

"I too shall never forget," she murmured. "How can I ever forget?"

As she spoke, they were interrupted. Evidently the unwelcome

figure of old Colette had appeared at the top of the flight of steps leading to this hilltop, for I heard the young man utter a groan of exasperation and exclaim impatiently, "Here comes the old shrew, now! Cannot she ever leave us alone?"

I heard the old woman's puffing as, exhausted by the climb, she advanced toward them. A moment later, close at hand, I heard her saying, almost scornfully, "This is for you, m'sieu."

"What is it, Colette?" exclaimed the American.

I could control my curiosity no longer. I peered from the window. The painter was staring with a puzzled expression at a large envelope which Colette, obviously, had just placed in his hands.

"How should I know, m'sieu?" said the woman, in a tone of utter indifference. "I do not read English. It was brought from Fort-de-France."

"But, Colette!" exclaimed Mam'selle de Jaunville. "Where did you get it? How does this happen?"

"It was given to me at the hotel where m'sieu is lodging," answered the maid. "I had stopped there to ask my friend, *la patronne*, if she had seen you pass. It was then that the letter arrived. She thought that it might be urgent, and as she did not know when m'sieu might return, I offered to bring it here." She walked away to her accustomed sentinel post.

The young painter had already torn open the envelope and was hastily glancing through its contents; a deepening expression of annoyance darkened his face as he read.

"I hope it does not bring bad news?" the girl murmured, impulsively bending toward him, her lovely eyes clouded with sympathy.

The young man drew a deep breath. "No, no, not at all," he answered. "But it is maddening, since it calls me to Fort-de-

France for a few days. There are some matters of business to be attended to, some papers I must sign."

"Papers?" echoed the girl, hesitantly. "Something to do with your affairs in America? Perhaps my father could be of assistance?"

"No," he answered, smiling down at her. "They are merely papers that concern a period of my life I have put behind me. This letter assures me that when I have signed those papers I can forget those days forever. I shall return on the fourth afternoon from this! And then—then we can have our final sitting!"

Thrusting the crumpled letter into his pocket, he stepped back to examine his painting contentedly. He straightened his shoulders gaily and his bronzed face was wreathed in smiles.

"Yes, it will be better," he said. "I had thought to finish it today, but now I shall have an excuse for prolonging the sittings! Come, let us go."

Mam'selle Adrienne seemed unable to trust herself to speak. Without another word between them, the lovers descended the terrace. And old Colette, who had been sitting motionless, staring out at the sea, not unlike a gargoyle from the towers of Notre Dame, rose and followed them. They were gone, and suddenly a breeze coming from nowhere stirred the hibiscus tree, then died away as quickly as it had come. A single withered petal, darker than blood, drifted downward to the deserted bench. The breeze passed me, chilling my heart. With an involuntary shiver I closed the heavy doors of the chapel.

This was on a Tuesday. It was upon the Saturday that the painter promised to return. But he did not return. On Sunday, Mam'selle Adrienne called her maid, old Colette, to her and ordered her to go at once to Fort-de-France. It was Colette herself who, long afterward, repeated their conversation to me.

"Colette," whispered the girl, seizing the old woman's arm convulsively, "I want you to go to Fort-de-France for me, immediately! I have already ordered the carriage!"

"To Fort-de-France, at this hour?" exclaimed the wrinkled little mulattress, not believing her ears. "Why, it is already night! I would not arrive there till morning! What new madness is this that has come over you, mam'selle?"

"Yes, it is madness, Colette," mam'selle answered, a note of desperation in her voice. "Indeed I shall go mad if I do not learn the truth!"

"Ah, it is the young American painter, then, that you wish me to find!" exclaimed Colette, in high disapproval. "And all this nonsense just because he did not keep a tryst with you! A final sitting, indeed! Bah!"

Colette was indignant, but her scorn was wasted upon deaf ears.

"You will find others who will paint pretty pictures of you," she went on, "and to pay you pretty compliments, of which every word will be a lie. A good riddance!"

"But, Colette, you do not understand!" cried the girl, feverishly. "I *must* find him! I must! I must!"

"But why? He has not been your lover. I myself have seen to that. I have never let you out of my sight."

But instead of answering, Adrienne buried her face in her hands and burst into sobs which she strove in vain to control. Colette's snapping black eyes were fixed upon the girl's bowed head with a terrible intensity. As the meaning of the girl's refusal to answer slowly dawned upon her, she moaned and suddenly thrust her dark face close to Adrienne's.

"You would not have dared!" she stormed.

Sobs were Adrienne's only answer.

"Are you sure?" The old woman's fiercely whispered question cut like a knife.

"Yes, yes!" gasped Adrienne. "For the past week I have been sure! Oh, Colette, Colette, won't you help me? Not even you?"

Old Colette's anger vanished in a breath, and she soothed her young mistress caressingly. "There, there, have no more fear, my baby," she crooned. "I shall go."

"And you will bring him back?" pleaded Adrienne pitifully.

"Yes, my child, I will bring him back," Colette promised. And a moment later, alone in her darkened room, Adrienne heard the creak of the wheels and the clatter of the horses' hoofs as the carriage rolled away on its long journey.

This, as I say, was on the Sunday evening. The day following was, as I well remember, a day direct from Heaven, a day which dawned with a sky of cloudless blue and which dreamed all its lovely hours away in an unutterable serenity, until it seemed to give a pledge that all the days to follow would be blessed with the same heavenly calm. Foolish were they who believed that promise.

And yet the second morning had dawned fair and no hint of approaching disaster troubled its peace, a peace seemingly of paradise, until well after mid-day. I was spending the whole of that afternoon in meditation, in the little Chapel of the Hibiscus. As the hours passed, I became growingly conscious of a strange oppressive feeling in the air, a heaviness in the atmosphere which had supplanted the glorious freshness of the morning. At last, unable to shake off the feeling of foreboding which pressed more and more heavily upon me, I went to the window and looked out.

I was astounded when I saw that it had grown unusually dark.

To the west and north, an unearthly yellowish green light filled

the sky, bringing an awesome twilight, though the hour of sunset was still far distant. The whole surface of the sea to the southward was darkened by the black clouds overhanging it, clouds which were being driven toward us with terrifying rapidity. A wind of fearful violence had already sprung up, and was bending the bushes on the edge of the heights; but I knew that this was only the prelude to what must soon occur. The ominous signs in the heavens were unmistakable—we were about to face the full fury of a hurricane!

I glanced toward the terrace, down whose winding flight of steps I must go, if I were to attempt to reach the church below. But I stood frozen to the spot. There, near the topmost step, her slender form outlined against the baleful light in the sky, stood Mademoiselle Adrienne!

This was the afternoon when, if all went well, her lover should have returned with Colette from Fort-de-France. Poor child, she must have climbed that steep ascent in the hope that she would find him there. She had put on the white dress which she had always worn for the sittings. How long she had been waiting there, I could not guess. Certain it was that she had been oblivious of the rising storm.

At sight of her in her imminent danger, I was transfixed, I could not speak. Then I shouted her name, but she seemed not to hear me. Perhaps the words were swept away on the gale, perhaps she would have been deaf to any voice but his. And in the next instant the hurricane unleashed itself. Frantic, I shouted again, but all my cries were swallowed up in the vast shrieking of the wind. I saw her sink slowly to her knees, her arms raised in supplication, as though commanding herself to the mercy of *le bon Dieu*, who alone might aid her. I tried to struggle toward her. The wind lifted me and hurled me to the ground. On hands

and knees, I tried to crawl toward the hibiscus tree. The darkness had deepened. I could no longer see her.

The world about me seemed to be driven before the insane fury of the wind. The flying sand and gravel, leaves and smaller branches that had first been blown before it now were followed by great branches snapped from trees, like black wings flying overhead. It seemed as if all the demons of the nether world were riding to victory on the howling storm. No living creature had a chance to survive another hour on that hilltop.

Bruised and dazed, unable to find the girl, and convinced that the gigantic wind had carried her bodily away, I crawled back, working my way over the ground I had so laboriously covered, and at last managed to reach the shelter of the chapel. There I fainted. How long I lay there, I do not know. It was the young American who found me there at last, and roused me. When I opened my eyes I saw Colette standing beside him, wringing her hands.

At first I was conscious only of the quiet that pervaded the chapel. "Is the storm over?" I asked feebly.

"Only for the moment!" cried the young man, shaking me by the shoulder. "Where is she, father? There is no time to lose! This is only the interval of calm, soon it will begin again! For God's sake, where is she?"

"She was out there," I said thickly. Already the mutterings of the returning wind could be heard, and the chapel seemed again to tremble with its coming.

"Out where? Tell me quickly! Where is she?" The painter's voice was harsh with agony.

"Under the hibiscus tree," I gasped. "I tried to reach her. But she was gone."

Like a madman the artist turned and ran from the chapel, plunging into the very jaws of the storm, whose inhuman fury had redoubled.

"It is I who am guilty," moaned old Colette, sinking to her knees on the chapel floor. "If I had found him at Fort-de-France without delay, she would not now be lost!"

"But you did find him, Colette," I said comfortingly. "Did you not bring him here?"

"Yes, Father, but the blame for the delay is mine!" she insisted. "When I had searched the city till I found the hotel at which he was staying, I learned that an American woman was the person who had sent the letter summoning him to Fort-de-France. Without taking mam'selle's message to him, I first spied upon her. I found a place from which I could peer into her room. He was there, with her. I ran from the place, swearing that he should never know that my mam'selle, my white angel, had sent for him. I ran here and there about the city, for hours, almost out of my mind. But I could not bear to return to my poor little one, to break her heart.

"And at last I went to him. The De Jaunvilles are a proud family, but, to me, the happiness of my mam'selle was more than her father's pride. And so I sought this young man once again. I told him that unless he drove out this woman and returned at once to Ste. Anne I would see to it that the creature did not live one week! And then—oh, Father, how can I tell you?"

The withered frame of old Colette shook with self-condemnation. But with a supreme effort she pulled herself together and continued:

"I had misjudged him! If only I had gone to him at once, hours before this, he would have returned with me at once! This was a woman to whom he owed no affection whatever, a woman who had followed him to Martinique in spite of all his past efforts to shake her off. Even at that moment when I had been peering in at them, through her shutters, he had been telling her that he had pledged his heart to my dear mistress, and that it was useless

for her to remain on the island! And so we started immediately upon our return journey to Ste. Anne. We made the coachman drive furiously, I can tell you! But when we were just reaching the outskirts of the parish, the storm struck. We were forced to take refuge. During the lull which began only an hour ago, we reached mam'selle's house. But she had already gone, and we hurried here. Now it is all too late!"

Her voice rose to a wail of despair.

"Do not reproach yourself, Colette," I said. "He will find her, and all will still be well."

"No, no, it is too late! And it is I who have killed her!" moaned the poor old creature. "Do you not see, if I had not wasted those precious hours, we would have reached here before the storm? And now I shall never see my dove again! Because I loved her, I have killed her!"

And as I listened to the tempest shouting in its triumph, I trembled.

Old Colette was right. They found Mam'selle Adrienne in the morning, her bruised and broken body resting in the arms of her unconscious lover.

The portrait of Adrienne was finished.

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## YO, HO, HO, AND SO FORTH

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I WAS splashing and singing lustily in my morning tub. "Fifteen men on a dead man's chest! Yo, ho, ho, and a bottle of rum!" I can never remember the rest of the words, so I sang that one line until Loren Tutell, in the next room, intimated that he had had enough.

"For the love of Mike, lay off!" he pleaded. "And besides, how could fifteen men possibly crowd onto one man's chest? It can't be done!"

"Yo, ho, ho, and a bottle of rum," I repeated defiantly. "You take the low rum and I'll take the high rum, and I'll be in Martinique afore you. You rent a furnished rum, and I'll rent an unfurnished rum, and I'll be in the dining rum afore——"

I dodged just in time. Loren has no soul, no appreciation of a glorious voice.

We were to spend the day in visiting one of the plantations which supply Martinique's most famous product—rum.

There are statistics which will tell you just how many hundreds of thousands of bottles, worth just how many millions of francs, are shipped each year from Martinique. I can't quote them. You can easily look them up. All I know is that Martinique rum is among the best in the entire world, but, so far, not enough people in the United States are aware of its quality. Possibly it hasn't been advertised enough. They began making it about four hundred years ago. It is said to have been Christopher Columbus him-

self who first brought the sugar cane, from which rum is made, to the islands in 1502. Perhaps, now that I think of it, it wasn't to Martinique that he brought it, but to one of the adjacent West Indian Islands. Undoubtedly they have had plenty of time in which to learn how to make the stuff to perfection. And they have, I assure you.

Perhaps it will be sufficient to say that the American who has lived in Martinique quickly becomes accustomed to its own special tang, a tang which makes it distinguishable from all other rums, and he quickly learns to prefer it.

I think I am right in saying—and I hope no one will dispute me—that the production of rum is Martinique's principal industry. They make a great deal of it. Until the war began in 1939, most of it, of course, was shipped to Europe, in particular to France, the mother country. Where or how it is being distributed now, I can't tell. For all I know, it may be a military secret; and I promised Commandant Benech that I would not divulge any military secrets. This has been easy. I didn't learn any.

But I certainly felt that I ought to see something of the most important business in Martinique. You would hardly go to Pittsburgh for the first time without taking a look at its steel mills. I don't believe that many tourists, in the days when there *were* tourists, often got far enough into the interior of Martinique to look at a sugar-cane field or a rum factory. But we did.

We set off early, right after breakfast. We went to one of the biggest plantations on the whole island, the St. James. We drove nearly two hours to reach it, by the winding road which climbs the hills at the foot of the majestic Pitons du Carbet to an elevation of some two thousand feet—the Pitons are nearly three times that height—and which then descends to the eastward slopes facing the sapphire sea, in the shadow of Mont Pelée. The beauty

of that drive, the endless succession of entrancing vistas of hills and mountains green-cloaked in the tropical profusion of vegetation, was breath-taking.

Monsieur Raibaud, manager of the St. James plantation and president of the Chamber of Agriculture of Martinique, greeted us on our arrival and escorted us immediately to the vast acreage where the full-grown sugar cane was then being harvested. The sun was high—only an hour remained before noon. And again we exclaimed at the incomparable beauty of the scene unrolled before our eyes.

Far off to our left, its lofty summit veiled in clouds which floated slowly before the light breeze, rose the mighty wall of the sleeping volcano, Pelée. Beyond, to the end of the vision, stretched the emerald folds of the foothills. To our right, eastward and southward, the green hills came down to meet the limitless expanse of the sea which shimmered like a misty floor of a blue world, blue beyond dreaming. A ribbon of curving white surf divided sea and land. Cloud masses, dazzling white, drifted silently across the deep violet heavens.

Perhaps it is all this that is distilled to make the rum of Martinique.

Cradled between mountain and sea were the massed gold-green regiments of the ripened sugar canes. Their towering wall rose to twice the height of a man's head. From a low hilltop we looked down upon what seemed to be endless square miles of giant corn stalks, not spaced in rows, but planted so closely together that their tips formed a seamless carpet. The light warm breeze swayed it like a field of wheat.

Spaced along the foot of this sheer wall of living green—it was fully twelve feet high—were bits of bright color. They moved: black men and black women, cutting and gathering the cane.

Their garments, spots of bright yellow, vivid red, purple or pale blue, glowed in the sun like flowers by a garden wall. The men's bare black arms rose and fell with tireless hurry, the stooping figures of the women worked with almost frantic speed.

"Shades of Simon Legree!" I ejaculated, after I had watched in astonishment the furious pace with which these field hands worked. "What have you injected these people with? I have seen black laborers before, in Haiti and in Jamaica, and many another West Indian island, but I've never seen anything to equal *this* activity! What's the secret?"

Monsieur Raibaud laughed. "This is all for your benefit," he chuckled. "They don't, as a rule, work so vigorously. Far from it! But we told them last night you were coming this morning to make pictures of them, and that's the reason not only for their unprecedented display of activity but also for the holiday attire."

"Isn't this their usual dress?" I inquired.

Monsieur Raibaud smiled again. "Well, hardly," he said. "That is sweltering hot work, you know. As a rule, the men are stripped to the waist."

We watched the long double rank of workers go steadily forward, leveling the tall cane as they progressed, like an army advancing into enemy opposition. The men worked in pairs, each pair stationed about fifty feet from the next. Each man carried a murderous-looking weapon—a heavy bladed sword, the machete of Latin America, fully three feet long, and curved like a buccaneer's cutlass. The swordsman wielded it with both hands, swinging the heavy blade close to the ground, and the tall stalks toppled before its sweep in windrows. Any one of those strokes could slice through a head or a leg as easily as through a pat of butter. I hoped devoutly that each pair of men had been teamed because of their firm friendship. It was unpleasant to think of what

might ensue if they fell to quarreling at work. The practice of pairing may have originated in the old days, when all Martinique swarmed with the deadly fer-de-lance, and it was all too common for a worker in the cane fields to be bitten upon the bare leg or arm by one of those venomous serpents; perhaps greater safety was assured when the men went side by side. Today, I was told, the bushmaster and fer-de-lance have been virtually driven from the plantations; but the coupling still prevails.

A few paces behind each pair of men came a woman, whose task it was to gather up the long stalks of cane and bind them in bundles. The Creole name for her is *ammareuse*—a corruption of the French *amoureuse*, “the lover”? And if so, to which of the two men at whose heels she follows has she given her heart? Is it the eternal triangle, even in this blue-skied Garden of Eden, from which the serpent (they say) has been banished? There had best be no quarreling over her, with those weapons in hand. . . .

Fifty years ago, or more, the long ranks of the men and women marched forward against the army of sugar-cane stalks to the beating of a drum carried by a hired drummer, and to the accompaniment of their own chanting. I should like to have seen that half-naked army of black swordsmen, their women followers, and to have heard that chanting. The rich earth grew richer by that bloodless green slaughter. . . .

Until very recently, the bundled sheaves of cane were dragged to the sugar mills in clumsy wooden-wheeled carts drawn by patient teams of oxen. Today, on the well-managed great plantations, they are first heaped upon the backs of little burros which carry them to the miniature railway flatcars; then they are rolled along a narrow-gauge road from the fields to the nearest storage sheds, great open barns roofed with corrugated iron. From these sheds they are loaded, when the demand requires, upon modern motor

trucks and taken to the factory—the *usine*, as it is called—at which the cane juice is to be squeezed from the stalks.

The St. James *usine*, which we visited in the afternoon, was many miles from the fields where we had watched the cutting of the cane, in quite another section of the island and much nearer its chief seaport, Fort-de-France. I like to fancy that as soon as we gathered up our cameras and left the fields, the long line of field hands—the whole *atelier*—who had been sweating so freely to impress us with their devotion to work, gave a sigh of relief and sank at once into the noon siesta which they had so nobly earned.

At the St. James *usine*, we saw the heaped-up bundles of cane being unloaded from the motor trucks to an outdoor platform, where a workman armed with a long-handled rake guided the stalks into a shallow and lengthy conveyor which carried it in a never-ending stream from the platform into the building.

So bright had been the glare of the sun overhead that when we first entered the building, and for several minutes thereafter, we could scarcely see. But, working with flash bulbs and special lighting equipment, we enabled the camera lenses to do their work. A maze of gigantic power-driven machinery, huge as that in the dynamo room of a street-car powerhouse, filled the high-ceilinged iron shed with its roar and rumble. Hour after hour there stood at the inward end of the conveyor trough a young workman who guided the river of stalks into the bins where the stalks were chopped up, shredded and crushed, until all their juices flowed into pipes which carried them to enormous vats. The naked and glistening bronze torso of that young workman had a physical perfection which would have made a sculptor cry out in wonder. He might well have posed for a statue of Black Martinique.

The cane juice, having reached the huge vats, is left in them



Cane-fields beside the sea



The cane is gathered by men and women



Trucking cane from the field sheds



A conveyor belt takes it in



The stalks go into the crusher



Experts test the fermenting cane-juice

MARTINIQUE RUM, FROM FIELD TO FERMENTATION



(The Harbor of Cayenne, French Guiana, Where the Jungle Meets the Sea)



The Colonial Hospital, Cayenne; Convicts Working in the Public Square

for partial fermentation. Straw-hatted black men stir them with long ladles from time to time, and when the iridescent bubbles winking on the surface of the liquid—it is Martinique's liquid red gold, in truth, soon to be converted into minted coin—show that the proper degree of natural fermentation is approaching, a white-garbed young priest of chemistry draws off a sample to be studied. This must be distilled as a sacred liquid, this rum of Martinique!

From the big vats it is pumped, at the proper stage, to the stills in which it completes its magic distillation; and from the still it gurgles into the barrels in which it will remain until it has mellowed to that stage where it resembles the kiss of a maiden of Martinique—dusky, delicious and dangerous. Or so I'm told.

We didn't wait for that stage to arrive, Loren and I, at the factory. The afternoon was waning, and we got back to Fort-de-France just at the cocktail hour. We dismissed our taxi at the Hôtel de la Paix, whose Bar Normandie serves the finest rum cocktail in Martinique.

We had seen the sugar cane cut in the fields that morning. Now we were going to sample the finished product.

There was a plump-faced young gentleman with glossy black hair, protruding pale eyes and a tight-fitting suit standing next to us at the bar. He was there before we came in. He was a complete stranger.

Just as Loren and I were beginning our second rum cocktail, this young gentleman leaned over, put his lips close to my ear, and whispered mysteriously:

*"It has been stolen!"*

I pulled away from him, naturally startled a bit. I stared at him. He nodded his head up and down, vigorously, in confirmation of his surprising assertion.

"Yes!" he repeated emphatically. "Absolutely! I have it from an absolutely reliable source, I can assure you, m'sieu. *It has been stolen!*"

I felt beads of perspiration gathering on my brow. "You don't say so!" I ejaculated. I turned to Loren. "Loren, do you hear what he says?" I asked. "He tells me they've stolen it!"

"No!" exclaimed Loren. "For a fact? It seems hardly possible."

He glanced doubtfully at his rum cocktail, and then at our new friend. "It doesn't seem probable," he added, shaking his head skeptically. "Why, when they grow the cane right here, and make it on the island, it certainly ought to be cheap enough. Do you really mean that the management would risk stealing it, just to save a penny or two?"

The young stranger slapped his own forehead dramatically. "Gentlemen, it is not possible that you do not know what I am talking about!" he exclaimed. "I do not speak of the rum, heavens, no! I am speaking about *It*. On my word of honor, *It* has been stolen. I tell you this, m'sieu, in strictest secrecy!"

He was bursting, almost trembling, with the importance of his terrific news. Our skepticism had practically reduced him to the point of tears.

"Oh!" I said. "Why didn't you say so in the first place?"

Of course we knew what he was talking about. In all Martinique "*It*" referred to only one thing—the gold. Every day there was a fresh story, a fresh rumor. You couldn't make the most casual acquaintance without hearing some new tale about *It*. And what was *It*?

It was the gold bullion, worth \$368,400,000, which had been sent across the Atlantic by the French Government in the last days of France's fight against the advancing Germans. It had been in-

tended for use in purchasing munitions in the United States, with which to carry on the war. But, before it could reach New York, France had been forced to surrender. The gold had got only as far as Martinique. And there, supposedly, it has stayed, buried deep in some stone dungeon under the walls of Dessaix, the antiquated fortress which crowns the hill at Fort-de-France.

Perhaps it was still there, during our visit, perhaps it wasn't. But no more fruitful topic of conversation had ever come to Martinique. The number of "absolutely reliable" rumors as to its present whereabouts was endless, and a new one was invented each day. Loren and I were fed up to the teeth with them.

"Listen," I said to our palpitating young gossip at the bar, "I don't want to hear your story of how It has been stolen. Don't tell me. I myself am the only man in Martinique who knows what has actually become of it."

"You are?" he gasped, backing down without a struggle. "You would perhaps confide the secret to me, m'sieu? It shall remain a secret, I swear it!"

"Gladly," I said. "You have seen, of course, those sixty-five war planes from the United States that arrived here a year ago, on their way to France, but were interned before they could be loaded upon the French aircraft carrier, the *Bearn*?"

"But, yes, I have seen them."

"How recently?"

"Oh, perhaps a fortnight ago. They were parked there as usual, wing to wing, in the guarded field. Why, m'sieu?"

I lowered my voice. "Ah, then you do not know!" I whispered. "Go out there and have another look! The field is empty! The gold was carried out of Fort Dessaix at the stroke of midnight last night, loaded on to the planes, and they are gone! If you do not believe me, go and see for yourself!"

"Name of a name!" he ejaculated. He didn't even pause to ask where the sixty-five trusty pilots had been recruited. He put on his hat and hurried out to spread the story.

"Nice work, Nicol," beamed Loren Tutell. "I was afraid he was going to nick us the price of a drink."

We finished our rum in peace and departed. In the lobby we paused to read again our favorite tidbit of moral literature, a framed notice hanging by the desk. It read, a masterpiece of tactfulness:

*Notice to Guests:* Will you be kind enough to receive your visitors in the hall or in the salon of the hotel, as the rules of the hotel do not permit to go in the rooms? In certain cases this would do a great deal of harm to the hotel and spoil its good name. We cannot any longer refuse to some people what we allow to others.

Several days later a telephone call at the Hotel Lido informed me that Commandant Benech would receive me at the Admiralty; the papers which would permit me to enter French Guiana were all in order. Admiral Robert himself had signed them and Commandant Benech would be pleased to present them to me.

The Admiralty is a spacious house of two stories, surrounded by gardens and situated on the green heights overlooking the city and harbor of Fort-de-France. Its high-ceilinged rooms were filled with busy aides and clerks, as well as with the white-uniformed officers detailed to shore duty from the French naval vessels patrolling these waters. Though I had met many of these officers, we never discussed the war.

"Well, Commandant, I have kept my word," I said, as I was ushered into his private office. "We haven't photographed anything of a military nature."

The Commandant smiled, and I felt that my remark was a little superfluous. He was just as well aware as I of what we had photographed.

"I'm certainly grateful for the Admiral's permission to enter French Guiana," I added, as the Commandant handed me the documents prepared for me. "I understand that French Guiana's frontiers have been closed to travelers for more than a year."

"That is true," he said. "But we have decided, in your case, to make an exception." His manner was quite serious. "All that we ask is that you present your pictures before our Embassy in Washington when you return to the United States. Also that you accept the escort of an aide while you are inspecting the penal colony."

"Gladly," I agreed.

"Have you visited French Guiana before?" he asked.

"Not for several years."

"Ah, then you have not met the new Governor of the colony, M. Robert Chot. He was appointed only three years ago, but you will find he has already brought about great reforms there. May I ask what most impressed you on your previous visit? I myself have never seen the country."

"The position of the blacks," I answered without hesitation. "It is the only colony in the world, French or otherwise, in which the black people not only are virtually in charge of their own lives, but are the employers of whites. Nowhere else is that true, not even in Haiti."

"The blacks of French Guiana employ white servants?" he asked quizzically.

"Many of them do. These whites, of course, are the French *libérés*, white men who have served their terms in the convict camps and can find no other employment. But there is another feature of French Guiana which also is unique. I'm not referring

to the black upper class, which is either pure Negro, negroid, or a mixture of negroid and Chinese. I refer to the lowest class of all, which is a mixture of bloods such as can be found nowhere else in the world, a mixture which should never have come into existence."

"Indeed! And of what does this *sang-mêlé* consist?"

"Its roots were planted," I said, "when your country began to send her worst criminals, her convicted murderers, thieves and degenerates, to Guiana, nearly three-quarters of a century ago. These men were not only whites sent from France, but, in more recent years, Orientals from French Indo-China, blacks from the French possessions in Africa, and Arabs from French Morocco and from Syria. These men of various color were followed to Guiana by their women. The women not only contracted alliances with the men of their own race but also with those of alien races. Children resulted. And these in turn inter-married, still preserving the blood which, whether white, black, yellow or brown, was the blood of criminals. The mass of French Guiana's inhabitants may deny any such mixture in themselves. But there can be no doubt that in at least a certain stratum of the population there is this inherited blood of murderers and degenerates. Certainly not a pleasant layer of society, but, fortunately, one which is not found elsewhere in the world."

Commandant Benech shook his head soberly. "I hope," he exclaimed, "that you are not intending to write more sensational matter about the convicts. The penal camps of French Guiana have been so ridiculously exploited in the last few years! We wouldn't mind people writing about the camps, if they would only tell the truth as it is, and not let their imaginations run away with them."

"My interest in the convict camps is secondary," I assured him.

"My particular interest in French Guiana and Martinique, an interest which will be shared, I think, by all citizens of the United States, is based on the fact that world attention is shifting more and more to the Caribbean and to those countries which border the Atlantic."

"But after all," he observed, "the people of the United States must already know a good deal about French Guiana."

"No," I replied, "for as you yourself have just pointed out, the American public has been given only one side of the picture, and even that side has been painted in false colors. After all, the life of a few hundred convicts, whether that life is wretched or comfortable, is of comparatively small account in times like these, when the destinies of the world's population are at stake. But a country that is relatively so close to America's own shores, a country of such considerable expanse, is certainly of interest to us."

"And you must admit that we have been getting very little news, or none, of Martinique and French Guiana. We hear of other islands in the Caribbean, since our new air bases are dotted all the way from Florida to South America. But there isn't even a single American consul or consular agent in all French Guiana, the only country in the entire western hemisphere that hasn't any. Our Pan-American Airways company, with permission from the British, the Dutch and the Brazilian Governments, has built or is building landing fields on all sides of French Guiana, but French Guiana still remains unknown to the American traveler by air. Sir, I can assure you that America knows less about the France at her very door than she knows about France on the other side of the Atlantic!"

"Well, the best of luck to you in your survey of it," smiled the Commandant, as we shook hands with warmth. "France and America have been bound to each other by friendship for a century

and a half. I am sure that whatever you tell your countrymen will strengthen those bonds. *Bon voyage, mon ami!*"

Two days later, with four hundred pounds' weight of photographic equipment, on which I had to pay a dollar a pound as excess baggage, the plane rose from the harbor at Fort-de-France and headed south for Cayenne, six hundred miles away.

When we were a good ten thousand feet up and Martinique was only a spot of darker blue on the shimmering blue floor of the ocean beneath us, Loren leaned across the aisle and said triumphantly, "Well, I didn't get *all* of it, but I got a little."

"What do you mean, 'It'?" I gasped. "The gold?"

For answer, Loren reached down, fished something out of his suitcase, and held it up for me to see. It was a bottle of Martinique's finest.

"*I'll* say it's gold," he observed.

"Yo, ho, ho," I sang, above the hum of the propeller. "And so forth!"

PART II

FRENCH GUIANA



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# 6

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## "COME HERE A MOMENT!"

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THAT thin dark line on the sea's horizon, a hundred miles to the south, meant that we had come in sight of the northeastern shoulder of the continent of South America.

The steady hum of the plane's motors brought it closer and closer. The air liner's stewardess served us sandwiches. By the time we had finished luncheon, the plane had begun to lose altitude. The coast line was no longer gray, but a dark green. We were skimming just above the surface of the water, now, following the course of a muddy river which flowed sluggishly toward the blue sea now behind us. Green forests lined both banks of the river. We touched the water, bounced and skittered gently to a stop. "Here we are at Cayenne," said someone.

Loren and I looked around. There wasn't any sign of a city. The tropical verdure came down to the water's edge.

The plane taxied across the wide stream and came to its final stop at a wharf, a narrow pier surmounted by a shed, the Pan-American Airways landing station. We climbed out. There were three of us, Loren, myself and one other passenger. A French soldier held out his hand for our passports. His headgear was much like the regulation stiff blue *kepi* of the poilu, but his uniform wasn't a soldier's. He was dressed in brown shorts and a shirt open at the throat. We later discovered that his was a typical costume. Looking at our passports, he directed us to call at the Gendarmerie at any time later that afternoon, where they would be returned to us.

The three of us then got into the P. A. launch, and during the twenty-minute run down the river to the Customs building beyond the long pier at the entrance of Cayenne I glanced at our fellow passenger. He was a Frenchman, dark of complexion—not tanned, I thought, but of the swarthiness which is the birthright of the French of the Mediterranean provinces. He wore a sack suit of black light-weight wool, with a pin stripe of white, and, warm as the afternoon was, he never took off his heavy gloves. At the Customs House, I observed with amusement that he pushed forward to be the first in line. I couldn't imagine what occasion one might have for haste, in this lazy tropical town. He declared a box of chocolates, a few other odds and ends, and then, with a flourish, stripped off one of his gloves, unfolded a small paper package he had been concealing there, and displayed on the palm of his hand \$180 worth of raw gold.

"My gracious, where did you get *that*?" I exclaimed.

He waved his free hand with a lordly gesture. "Out there," he replied.

The Customs man, smiling, seemed satisfied with this indefinite information and passed him through. The man drew on his gold-bearing glove once more and departed, on foot, thus passing out of my life. I still wonder where he got it. But as long as he wasn't taking gold out of the colony, but bringing it in, I was the only person who cared a hoot.

The Pan-American provided Loren and me with a taxi to transport us to the Hôtel des Palmistes, which, although it is small, and no Waldorf, is the leading hostelry in Cayenne. It is a three-story structure of gray stucco, with shuttered windows, formerly the residence of one Papa Galmo, about whom I know nothing except the general belief that he was intimately associated with the colossal swindler Stavisky, whose operations, involving political person-

ages of France, provided all Paris with a sensation. It has been conducted as a hotel since the early 1930's. There are, it is true, two or three other houses in Cayenne at which rooms may be procured, but the Hôtel des Palmistes is the only one to which you might take your maiden aunt. In the United States, the others would not even enjoy the dignity of being called flophouses. A noteworthy aspect of the "hotels" of Guiana is that none of them depends on its house guests for its revenue. As we had anticipated, we two were the only American travelers in the entire country.

But although it is seldom enough, in these days, that foreigners come to France's penal colony, the local hotels do a roaring business. Abstention from liquors is one of those things that has never been dreamed of in Cayenne. The proprietor told me, in a burst of confidence, that the revenue from his bar netted him a substantial sum. I could readily believe him. This being a Saturday afternoon, the bar was lined with *fonctionnaires*, French governmental clerks, in white duck suits, who were drinking rum or whisky. Others were gathered about tables in the barroom, playing cards, checkers or dominoes.

The little Hôtel des Palmistes is situated on one side of the city's principal public square, directly facing the Colonial Hospital on the opposite side of the Savane. This square is dotted with palms, some of which must certainly be among the tallest in the world. Here are found the locally famous "sister" palms, a pair of Siamese twins. This pair of sister palms is, I was told, the only freak of its kind in the western hemisphere. On the roof tops bordering the square perched the sinister black shapes of the urubus, the vultures of Guiana, silent sentinels, ever waiting for some scrap of refuse to be thrown into the street or into some inner court. Flapping down to the streets, they stalk everywhere, scarcely troubling to get out of the way of passers-by, for they know they

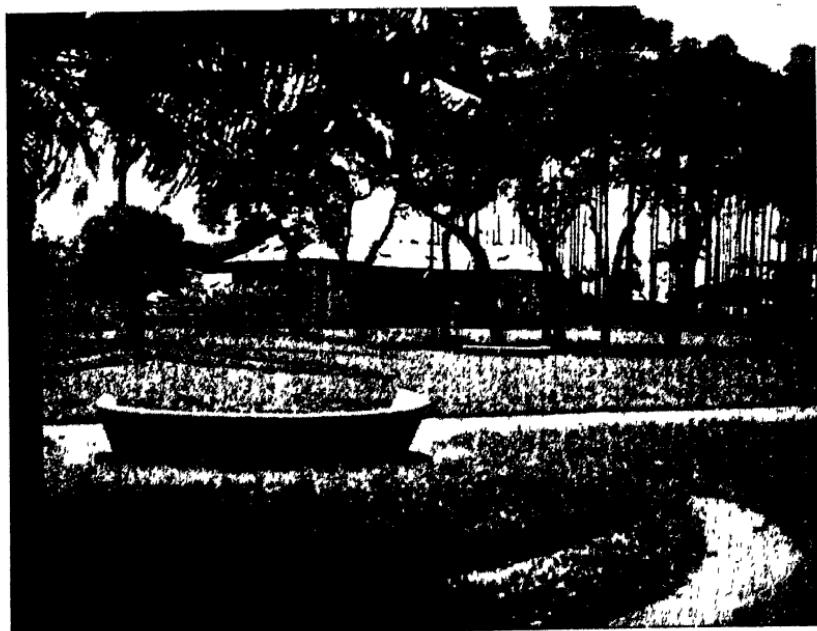
are within their rights. They are the official scavengers, the Street Cleaning Department of Cayenne, and woe to Cayenne if they were not there to remove the refuse! They adorn every housetop in the city.

The rooms to which we were shown at the Hôtel des Palmistes were the same that I had occupied on my previous visit to Guiana, a bedroom-sitting-room suite. A cotton mosquito netting was installed over the bed which was moved into the *salon*, and thus were Loren's quarters provided. There were two windows in each room, one opening on the street below, the other on the inner courtyard. The hotel was L-shaped, and within the L there was a tropical garden, somewhat neglected. The furnishings of our suite were simple—a huge double bed, covered with mosquito netting that fell to the floor, an armoire, a wash basin and pitcher to match, in white, decorated with green leaves and red cherries; a mirror, and a shelf beneath it for my toothbrush. There were two chairs in the room, a table which served as a desk, a rack with wooden pegs for clothing, and a white towel rack. The walls were of boards, painted a light purple, somewhere between a mauve and a maroon in tint, but the walls of Loren's room were of a baby blue. Outside the windows on the façade of the building were narrow balconies at the second-floor windows, with ornamental iron grillwork, reminiscent of France. But these accommodations were luxuriously modern, in comparison with those of earlier days. Up until the early 1930's, the few travelers who did come to Cayenne found no lodging except at a convent, conducted by the nuns. The past decade brought several changes. One can now obtain a suite like ours, bedroom, sitting room, and three square meals a day, including two bottles of red wine, for two dollars and forty cents.

The plumbing, of course, is out doors. There is a shower, which runs if you feel adequately energetic. It was similar to the one with which we struggled in Martinique, at the beach bunga-



The vultures (Urubus) scavenge the streets of Cayenne



The Gendarmerie, or Police Station, is near the Palace



The famous "sister" palm of Cayenne



The canal where the fishermen moor their boats, Cayenne

low called Jean-Marie-les-Bains. The most necessary of the plumbing adjuncts is completely Chic Sale. It is *chic*, rather than *sâle*. A svelte wooden box, it looks out over a huge pile of empty Perrier bottles and lesser pyramids of emptied *Moët et Chandon* bottles, topping non-vintage magnums. When I first visited Cayenne, some years ago, sanitary paper was at a premium in the colony but there was always to be found, neatly folded, and in the proper place, the *Journal du Matin*. This organ of the press in Cayenne was very thin and small, but had excellent news. It was in such fashion that I first read of the sudden end of one John Dillinger.

After Loren and I had unpacked and had enjoyed a cold drink at the hotel bar, we strolled over to the Gendarmerie to get our passports. This, the central police station, is located on the far side of the *rue la Louette*, next door to the Governor's palace. The passports were ready for us, so there was no delay, and we went on to the Governor's mansion. This "palace" is undoubtedly the most imposing building in the city. Built more than a century and a half ago by the Jesuits, who once ruled over French Guiana, it is a huge gray sprawling building with a portico of Doric columns. The Governor, to whom I wished to present a letter of introduction, was at his summer palace at Bourda in the country, for the weekend; and his *Chef-du-Cabinet*, to whom the letter might have been delivered, was also out of town. So we left it with a secretarial clerk and walked back to our hotel. We had hardly reached it when a thunderstorm broke. But while the skies darkened and the torrents raged down the streets we sat placidly in the bar sipping rum cocktails and felt that we had indeed reached the end of the world.

By ten o'clock we had finished our dinner. With no more capacity for rums, nothing remained but to go to bed. A Saturday night in Cayenne had little flavor.

But Sundays in Cayenne are livelier. We walked about town

in the afternoon. Most of the houses lining the streets were low, built of a sort of stucco, occasionally painted blue, brown or yellow, but predominantly red. The streets were of hard red clay, a color into which the red of the house fronts blended.

"Say, is Guiana all red?" exclaimed Loren.

"Wait till you get out into the back country and see the red roads," I replied. "And the red skins of the Indians. And the natives' fondness for red in everything they wear. It isn't Communist, but Guiana is certainly red."

The evening is the gala time. The citizens were parading in their finery. Nine out of ten persons on the streets were black, or a shade of black, although there were many Chinese, Indo-Chinese, and East Indians to be seen as well. Black mothers proudly led strings of ten daughters, their pigtails tied with ribbons of brilliant hue. Oriental mothers with sons fathered by Carib Indians passed by. Big buck Negroes from the interior strutted by in resplendent clothing, bought with their hard-earned wages. And all were heading in the same direction, the Cinema.

Loren begged off, but I decided to watch the movie fans, and went alone. The theater was patterned after our own, with main floor and balcony, with loges at the front of the balcony. The best seats came high—about sixty cents. I treated myself to a loge ticket and was shown to a box with two chairs. After I had seated myself I was astonished to see that the black populace bought the expensive seats and the white French sat in the gallery or downstairs, in the cheaper ones.

The picture was about to begin, when I became conscious of an overpowering odor which was advancing toward me with the impact of a solid wall. It was not just one smell, it was a concentration of many smells. It emanated, I saw as I glanced around in alarm, from a young black lady who was heading directly for my

box. To my horror, she settled herself in the empty chair at my right. Plainly, she had not been satisfied by applying to herself one bottle of perfume at a time. She must have drenched herself with the contents of several, assorted.

And she was clearly a Personage in the town, no doubt of it. She was wearing a form-fitting dress of red silk, which sharply outlined her firm breasts. Her hair was inky black in color and kinky of texture. Both arms were encircled by bracelets of native make, heavily encrusted with enormous gold nuggets. Her teeth were snow white, but as pointed as if they had been filed. She sat straight as a ramrod, paying no attention to the buzzing which could be heard from all parts of the theater, and which was quite obviously directed at us. I couldn't see the black faces, though I knew they were all turned toward us. All I could see were hundreds of white eyeballs in a sea of darkness, and all fixed upon *me. Or us.*

At last the lights were turned down and the picture began. It was a French creation, of the last decade, and to a Hollywood enthusiast it was dismal in construction. Soon the air grew stifling, and the assault of the shock-troop perfumes was consolidated by the waves of general perspiration odor rising from all points, so that I felt I should become ill if I did not immediately get out doors. But just before I surrendered, a door was opened at my left, letting in a little fresh air, so I was enabled to stick it out for the remaining fifteen or twenty minutes.

It was a humid night, even for Cayenne. The heat in the theater was almost unendurable, the show pathetic in its crudity, and the odors all-enveloping; but even in hating it all I had been tremendously fascinated by the whole scene. A bad French picture can be as far removed from the artistry of a good French picture, such as *The Baker's Wife*, as night is from day. This one was.

Here and there in the audience were "second-term" convicts, who have extra-mural liberty. These frequently showed their disapproval of the film by hurling peanut shells, bits of wood, handfuls of gravel or whatever else came handy, at the screen. When the Chinese proprietor of the theater came out to make a protest against this behavior he too was pelted, and withdrew in double-quick time. No one paid much attention to the film; the audience had come to see the audience perform, and this one was undoubtedly giving a great rendition.

I have visited cinema theaters in Polynesia, in Russia, in the Near East and in other sections of the world somewhat off the beaten tourist track, and have observed audiences which could only be called bizarre; but my Sunday night at the Palace Theater in Cayenne showed one what was so far the ultimate in individuality. Here, tightly packed and squeezed into the hard little seats, was the most racially-mixed assembly one might find anywhere on earth. Half-blacks, quarter-blacks, fractional-blacks, these fractions completed by requisite amounts of any color you please; at heart savages, only one step removed from the jungle, like the lady next to me. She sat there motionless, in her cheap finery, a jungle creature; yet she laughed when the French laughed, smiled when she should smile, partly because it was the thing to do, and partly because she wanted, in her primitive femininity, a chance to show the young white man those cruelly pointed teeth.

In the name of civilization, what horrors have we committed on the primitive! We make them conscious of their nakedness, cover them with atrocious cottons and crinolines, then teach them the existence of convention; and, with their robotlike application, they carry out convention to the *n*th degree. Here was a young and healthy animal whose every bodily curve advertised strength and suppleness. She came to sit there only because the white man

amused himself that way. She didn't understand the picture, but she was doing her best. Still, how comparable to the short-cut culture seeker of our own world, or to the very obvious *nouveau riche* who strives to find a protective coloration!

I stopped in for a beer at the bar adjoining the theater. It was ice cold, and delicious. A spotless waiter in white produced it from an even more spotless refrigerator. The "City of Condemned Men" most certainly had its comforts, for those who could afford to pay the price.

It was the beer that led me to another example of what could be bought for money in that night's humid darkness. The beer was so cold and revived me to such an extent that my natural inclination for walking and for prying about in general rose again. I decided to stroll about for a while before returning to my hotel.

Cayenne is not a town in which one could easily lose one's way. The theater was only a few blocks from the Savane, the square on which my hotel faced, and the Savane is more or less in the center of everything. East or south, a ten-minute walk would bring you to the outskirts of the city, and to the jungle; west was the river; and the fourth boundary was the Atlantic Ocean.

At the next table in the bar sat a man who, from his appearance, must have survived several lifetimes in Guiana. He drooped. I ventured to ask him what there was of interest to be seen in the town. He brooded for several minutes before replying and then said:

"*La mouton paresseuse*. But you cannot see her now," he added dreamily, still speaking in French, "for the gardens are closed."

For a moment I thought the fellow must be in his cups. "*La mouton paresseuse*" meant, so far as my knowledge of French extended, "the lazy sheep." What on earth was the man talking about? How could any sheep, no matter how lazy, be regarded

as one of the notable sights of the city? And whose gardens were these, now closed, in which the lazy sheep permitted the public to admire her? Could this sleepy-looking citizen be trying to pull my leg?

“The lazy sheep!” I exclaimed, hoping to stir him into an explanation of his puzzling recommendation. “What is she?”

But I was not successful. His head slumped down into his hands, and immediately, without any period of transition, he was asleep.

Not until the next day did I learn, from the voluble manager of my hotel, that “*la mouton paresseuse*” was not a sheep at all, but that amazingly slow-moving creature of the jungles which in our language is known as the sloth. There was one to be seen, I was told, at the municipal Zoological Gardens. No wonder that my somnolent friend in the bar regarded her as the most wonderful thing to be admired in the city. He was probably patterning his life upon hers.

But I didn’t go to the Zoo that night, when I started on my midnight prowl. I had walked possibly five or six blocks, passing row upon row of unlighted houses which seemed remarkably alike in their dreariness, and had come almost to the southern fringe of the town, not far from the canal where the fishermen moor their boats, when I heard a woman’s voice calling from a near-by window whose shutters were cautiously pushed open the merest crack.

“*Blanc! Blanc!*” the voice called coaxingly. “*Venez ici un moment!*”

I looked around, puzzled. Then, perceiving that I was the only white man on the street, I realized that I was the “*blanc*” who was being urged to come to the darkened little house.

I determined to accept the invitation and discover what adventure might be in store for me.

The door must have been on the latch, for I had no sooner

touched it than it swung back. I found myself in a squalid dimly lighted little hallway from which a door opened into a small room, out of which came no sound.

I glanced into the room. It seemed empty. Lighted only by one smoking oil lamp fixed in a bracket on the wall, its squalor was apparent even in the half-darkness. The room was bare of furniture excepting for a cot in one corner, a table pushed against the opposite wall, and two rickety chairs. On the table reposed a large bowl of water, and from a nail above it hung a very dirty towel. Seeing no one in the room, I was about to turn and go out into the street, when from behind me appeared the woman who had summoned me.

She was a mulatto in her early thirties, and although her features were coarse she possessed a good figure which she took little trouble to hide. But she was not interested in selling her own charms. She had other merchandise to offer. Gliding past me and volunteering no information except a fixed smile intended to be alluring, she crossed over to the cot. With a single motion of her arm she pulled back the sheet which covered it.

I had to look a second time before I was sure. The child was motionless, apparently in a deep slumber. I doubt if she could have been more than eleven or twelve years old. Her naked little bronze body, whose slender contours glistened in the faint glow of the lamp overhead, was very beautiful. She must have been bathed with some sort of oil or unguent to have gleamed with such a shimmering radiance. Her flowerlike face, innocent in sleep, gave no clue as to her parentage. I was only sure that she could not have been the child of the dark mulatto. But there seemed to be racial hints of all the five continents in her features, a little of this and a little of that, all blending to produce their final perfection of mold. She was a changeling, of Cayenne.

"She is yours, m'sieu, for ten francs," whispered the procuress

coaxingly. The rays of the headlamps of a passing cab shone through the shuttered window, drawing bright bars of light across the child's face, so that she appeared to smile in her sleep. I took some money from my pocket and handed it to the mulatto.

"Let her sleep, for this one night at least," I prayed.

In the street, I turned to look back at the house. The mulatto was still smiling.

The light of the lamp on the hall table fell clearly on her face and I saw for the first time the reason why the woman would be forever smiling. Leprosy had drawn back her upper lip.

But it was not that which horrified me, so much as the voice I then heard, the voice of the child. The little one was screaming in a very passion of childish fury. "Give me my half of that money!" she screamed. "You promised me I should have half, for my very own!"

## 7

THE RHODINUS PROLIXUS

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MONDAY came, and although I had deposited my letter of introduction to the Governor at his official mansion on the day of our arrival, there was still no word of acknowledgment that he had received it. I was beginning to be slightly apprehensive. Wasn't any American welcome in French Guiana?

But that evening brought a message, blowing away my fears—the Governor would receive us at nine the next morning.

We arrayed ourselves in white, and, fortified with cups of hot chocolate, Loren and I set off across the palm-shaded park for our interview. Black Senegalese soldiers in khaki, their red fezzes providing a striking note of color against the thirteen tall pillars of the old palace, stood at attention as we entered the gateway. After a momentary wait in the office of the Governor's secretary, M. Diminescu, we were ushered up an imposing stairway and into the presence of Governor Robert Chot.

He rose to greet us, all smiles. He was a man of slender but wiry and athletic physique, with coal-black hair and flashing eyes. His cordiality instantly relieved any doubts I might have harbored as to the welcome French Guiana has for a friend."

"I must apologize for not having received you before this," he exclaimed. "But when your letter was presented to me I had to cable Martinique to verify it. We must be painfully cautious in these times. There have been some forgeries."

"Had you had no word from Martinique that I was coming?" I asked.

"No, none," he replied. "But that in itself is not surprising. The British at Trinidad are midway between us, you know. They intercept all mail passing through Trinidad on the Pan-American air liners. Until only recently, I had not even heard from my son in Paris, who is but twelve years old. And even then there was no letter from him until it was brought by a *French* boat."

His eyes grew grave for a moment.

Though his face instantly became wreathed again in smiles, its passing shadow had been enough to remind me once more that I was no longer in my own country, where "aid for England" was on every lip, but upon French soil; and that in Syria, even then, the guns of France were firing against the guns of England.

"But enough of that!" he smiled. "Martinique has identified you, and we are happy to have you as our guest. Madame Chot and I will be pleased if you will lunch with us tomorrow at our country place. And, in the meantime, just what is it that we can do for you?"

I answered that our first desire was to be told what scenes we would be permitted to photograph in French Guiana and what must be forbidden.

"But you can film everything!" he exclaimed. "We have nothing here to hide. Photograph whatever you wish!"

He rang for his secretary. "Is Captain Richard here?" he inquired. "Please ask him to step in for a moment."

As we waited, I glanced around at the furnishings of the spacious office. The panelings and furniture were all of magnificent dark woods, mahogany or walnut in appearance but in reality *lait-moucheté* and *wacapou*, two of Guiana's rarest woods. The walls were a dark blue-green in color, giving the whole room a somewhat somber effect, but one which afforded the perfect background, I realized, for the personality of its occupant. Robert

Chot is so dynamically alive that I perceived at once, though this was but our first meeting, a setting as gay and vibrant as himself would be overpowering. The force of the man is tremendous, he is young, only forty-four, and yet he is a veteran in the administration of foreign colonies, with twenty years of service behind him, years spent in Madagascar and in Pondicherry.

The doors opened a second time. The Governor's secretary reappeared, bringing with him a tall lean individual with the impassive face of a poker player, Captain Richard, known throughout the colony as the Governor's right hand.

"Captain Richard," said the Governor, introducing us, "these two gentlemen are to be here for a few weeks to make pictures of our country. We must prepare for them a list of things interesting to see."

The captain nodded in agreement, without opening his lips. He shook hands with us, smiling, but still silent.

I was soon to discover that, taciturn as he is, Captain Richard is the most likable of men, the pleasantest of companions, an inexhaustible mine of information concerning all things in the colony. It was only that he never permits himself to show any emotion. His years in Indo-China, in the sinister and mysterious jungles of Laos, on the borders of Thailand, had schooled him to that immobility of countenance. Within the next twenty-four hours I was to learn that nothing could startle him from that masklike composure, not even the narrowest of escapes from imminent death.

"Captain Richard will be at your disposal this afternoon," the Governor continued. "At three, he will call for you at your hotel. We shall have the list prepared by then. And tomorrow you will lunch with Madame Chot and me? Good!"

The Captain arrived at the Hôtel des Palmistes on the moment.

In his hand he held the list. We grew to know him as the embodiment of punctuality and efficiency.

"Have you any preference," he asked politely, "as to which place of interest we shall visit first?"

"None at all," I replied. "We are in your hands."

The Captain gave an order to his chauffeur in rapid French and in a moment we were bowling off.

"The Governor has suggested for this afternoon a visit to the Pasteur Institute," he explained. "He believes you will enjoy meeting Doctor Floch, the director."

"Pasteur Institute?" I repeated, in some amazement. "That must be something new in Cayenne. I don't remember its being here on my previous visit."

"You are right," said the Captain, "it is something new, and so is its director. That is, insofar as time is concerned. He has been here only since the thirtieth of December, 1938."

"Your memory for dates is precise, Captain," I observed.

"As a rule, no," he returned. "But in this case it is rather different. Since Doctor Floch came to us here, he has made such sweeping changes that we all find ourselves dating events from the time of his arrival, or before it."

"What an extraordinary compliment!" I exclaimed. "Tell me, how has he earned it?"

Captain Richard explained, tersely but admirably. Dr. Floch had arrived in the colony, from Paris, with the official title of Director of Sanitation, nothing more. He at once realized, having inspected the city, that the first step must be to clean up its filth. Among other causes of sickness which he noted were the rain-troughs under the eaves of the houses, which almost everywhere had become clogged, gathering stagnant water which was the breeding place of malarial mosquitoes. He ordered them removed

at once. In this, as in everything else, he was to meet opposition from the blacks, who compose almost the entire population of the city. But he was undiscouraged, and little by little health conditions were improved.

"Doctor Floch threw himself into the study of tropical diseases," continued Captain Richard, "but his biggest job, he knew, would be the fight to prevent the spread of leprosy."

"Is there leprosy here?" asked Loren, uncomfortably.

"We have about five hundred lepers here in Cayenne," replied the Captain. "One in every twenty persons is a leper. Yes, out of the city's population of eleven thousand, about five per cent are afflicted with it."

"Every twentieth person has leprosy!" exclaimed Loren. "Good heavens!"

"Let me tell you what happened to me, the last time I was here," I interrupted. "I had some laundry to be sent out, and gave it to one of the hotel boys—an ex-convict, by the way. It didn't come back on the day promised, so I asked one of the chambermaids if she knew what the trouble was. 'Oh,' said she, 'that laundress died yesterday.' 'Died?' I asked. 'From what?'

"'Leprosy,' she answered, in a matter-of-fact voice.

"I gave up trying to get that laundry back."

The car came to a stop. We had arrived at the Pasteur Institute. In the little white office where the lepers came to be treated by his two assistants, Catholic Sisters of Charity, Dr. Floch was awaiting us.

Somehow or other, I had expected to meet a tall, powerfully built man, but the opposite was true. Dr. Floch is a little man, although of tremendous vitality. You felt it in the tone of his voice, the grip of his hand, the firmness of his step. He was slightly over five feet tall, with the face of a quizzical hawk—the

typically big Breton nose set between falcon-keen dark eyes. He would do battle, this fierce-eyed bird.

"You treat lepers here? What do you give them?" I asked.

"Injections of Chamulgra oil."

"Is it always beneficial?"

"In some cases it is helpful. In others, it doesn't appear to be of much use."

"What do you do with them after giving them the injections?"

"They go home." The doctor seemed hardly more loquacious than Captain Richard.

"They are not isolated?"

"How can they be? They go home, or they mingle with the crowds." The little doctor spread his hands in a gesture of helplessness.

"But I thought you already had a leprosorium."

"Yes, we have two. But they are small. Utterly inadequate for the number of cases coming to us. And so wretchedly like jails that the people refuse to be sent to them. That is why we are hurrying to complete the leprosorium at Kourou."

"What will you do if you encounter the same objections at Kourou?"

"Ah, but we will not. We are making it spacious, clean and attractive. It will have running water and modern toilets. It will be far more attractive than the hovels these people come from. Why, it will even have a motion-picture theater!"

"Will all lepers be sent there?"

"No, at least not those in the early stages, nor adults of independent means, whose homes permit of their being isolated in a suitable room, and who can pay for medical attendance at home. Nor will children be sent to the Kourou leprosorium."

"Surely, there aren't many children with leprosy!" I exclaimed,



A VIEW FROM THE TERRASSE OF THE HOTEL DES PALMISTES  
At the left, Captain Richard's residence; in the distance, the Governor's  
Palace; at the right, a corner of the public square, the Savana



THE GOVERNOR'S PALACE, BUILT AT THE END OF THE 18TH CENTURY



ROBERT CHOT, GOVERNOR OF FRENCH GUIANA (*seated*); HIS AIDE, CAPTAIN RICHARD



DOCTOR FLOCH, DIRECTOR OF THE PASTEUR INSTITUTE LEPROSORIUM  
With him are the two Sisters of Charity who assist him in his work with the  
lepers of Cayenne

remembering how few I had seen in the leper colonies on the island of Hainan and at Pakoi, in South China.

"You think so?" retorted Dr. Floch. "You will be surprised when I tell you. Several months ago I examined all the school-children in Cayenne, numbering about a thousand. I discovered sixty cases in the junior grades alone! To permit them to continue there was, of course, unthinkable. With the splendid co-operation of Governor Chot, we began at once to erect at the beach a special school building, of white cement and wood, with dormitories, a classroom, and, most important of all, running water and two toilets. There will also be a room where our two Sisters of Charity can treat the patients. You understand that the Sisters are to be the teachers, also."

"Have the children already been sent there?"

"No, not yet, because the building itself has only just been completed, but it will be ready for occupancy before this summer of 1941 is over, you may be sure. For the moment, the young ones are at home with their families. It is not satisfactory, but it is the best we can do. At least they are no longer with the uncontaminated children."

"How do their families feel about this?" I asked. "Grateful, aren't they?"

"On the contrary! They fought us bitterly for taking their children out of the regular school and separating them from the other children, their friends."

"But why? Are they really so ignorant?"

"Of course! They insist that leprosy is not contagious, and nothing can convince them that it is. They cling to the delusion that it can be contracted only by eating freshwater fish, such as sole, or from eating the flesh of certain kinds of deer."

"Where do they get such notions?"

"Heaven knows. I've tried to find out from them if there's any sort of foundation for such beliefs, but they can't make any intelligible answer. Yet nothing we can tell them will make them give up those nonsensical superstitions."

"I don't envy you your task," I said sympathetically. "It's amazing that you have succeeded in making any progress at all, against such a mass of ignorance. But, tell me, who designed this very up-to-date building of yours? Was your architect a Frenchman or a native Cayennais?"

The little doctor's eyes twinkled, for the first time. "A Breton," he replied. "And I am it! I was the engineer for the construction of the cesspool, and the plumber who installed the toilet and planned the installation of the running water. I not only designed it, I superintended the work. There wouldn't have been any running water if I hadn't. And running water is the first necessity. After all, in this job, I am constantly in need of washing my hands. . . .

"But come along upstairs. I want to show you my laboratory. I have something there that may interest you."

The boyish eagerness in his voice as he uttered this last sentence indicated his own boundless interest in his researches. As we reached the top of the stairs a thin, wiry-looking man with red hair looked up from the microscope into which he had been peering and stepped forward to greet us.

"This is our entomologist, M'sieu Abonneng," Dr. Floch beamed. "He has made a rare discovery in our colony. Abonneng, I must show it to these gentlemen!"

Bursting with pride, he hurried us on to a room filled with several cabinets, containing, I supposed, entomological specimens gathered in the jungle. By the window was a table on which stood a wooden rack holding several test tubes whose tops were stuffed

with cotton. The Doctor's hand was already outstretched as he trotted to the table. He seized the little glass tube he wanted.

"*Regardez!*" he cried proudly, whirling around to thrust it into my hand. "For two years, Abonneng had been searching the jungles, far and wide, to find this little fellow! For two whole years, my friend, and without success! Only last month he found it! And where did he find it? Figure to yourself!"

I couldn't imagine, of course, but even before I had had time to hazard a guess, Dr. Floch exclaimed triumphantly:

"In his own tent, of course! On the mosquito netting over his own cot! Where else? The little angel had flown in to offer itself up voluntarily! Why, do you know, sir, that this is the first time it has ever been captured in the history of French Guiana?"

I stared fascinated at the insect so safely imprisoned in the glass tube, certainly not more than half an inch in length. "What is it?" I asked.

"A *Rhodinus*!" exulted Dr. Floch. "It's the carrier of *la maladie de chagas*!"

"Chagas sickness?" I asked. "Never heard of it. What kind of a malady is it?"

"It's very rare," said the scientist, "outside of tropical South America. It is encountered in Brazil, although even there it is not common. The victim's eyes bulge out as the swelling spreads through his body. He falls into a slumber from which it is seldom possible to wake him. The disease is the South American equivalent, one might say, of the sleeping sickness of Africa. And it is this little fellow who carries it! His full name is *Rhodinus prolixus*. What luck, to have captured him!"

I handed the test tube back to him, gingerly. "For God's sake, don't drop it," I implored its owner.

Doctor Floch indicated some tiny pinpoints of matter, like

flecks of pink coral, that lay at the bottom of the test tubes in the rack.

"We shall have more of him," he announced proudly. "The insect lays pink eggs, as you can see for yourself. We shall endeavor to bring them to maturity and increase our knowledge of M'sieu Rhodinus. Never before have we, or anyone else, found an infected Rhodinus here in the bush. In fact, as I have said, this is the first one ever caught, sick or well."

"Then this Rhodinus is infected?" I asked, staring at it with a shiver.

"Most certainly! That is why this particular one is of such great value to us. We are now experimenting with guinea pigs, inoculating them with the disease. You should see the way in which Rhodinus transmits it, a quite unusual procedure. You know, the malarial mosquito makes a double puncture, sucking your blood from one and injecting his poison into you through the other. Now, our little gentleman makes only one puncture. Through this he continues to suck your blood until he has swollen up like a balloon. Then, when stretched to bursting, he withdraws his dagger, and, *wh-o-o-o-sh!* he blows out of himself all his filthy poisonous excreta over the very hole in your skin, and into you it goes. After that, your life will not be—happy."

On the day following, as had been arranged, Loren and I drove out to Governor Chot's country place at Bourda, on the coast, for luncheon. The imperturbable Captain Richard was also a guest. We enjoyed ourselves so thoroughly that we stayed on through afternoon tea, and when tea was over we stayed on for dinner. There was no getting rid of us. After dinner we all were seated on the wide veranda, sipping our coffee and liqueurs, with the sound of the surf roaring just beneath us. Captain Richard

was seated in a chair under the single porch light overhead. We were reminiscing about the great restaurants of Paris. The Captain, with his habitual calm, said little, but puffed at his cigar and sipped his brandy with unchanging countenance.

Suddenly, in the very midst of a sentence, Madame Chot leaped toward the Captain and swung at his neck. He never moved a muscle.

As we all sat, frozen with astonishment, Madame Chot dashed into the living room and instantly returned, holding in her hand a small empty bottle.

She plunged to her knees, beside Richard's chair. He stirred not an eyelash.

And then we saw what madame was doing. She had, with a single sweep of her arm, knocked a largish insect from the Captain's neck to the floor. It was lying there, stunned. She clapped the bottle over it, gathered it up, and fastened it in with a cork. Then, rising from her knees, she began to laugh. Up to then, not a single one of us had uttered a sound.

"Don't mind my wife," chuckled the Governor. "She has been studying with Doctor Floch at the Pasteur Institute, and she is forever capturing some queer bug or other. She deludes herself with the notion that one day she will corral a rarity."

"Oh, but Robert," young Madame Chot cried exultantly, "this time I really have caught a rare one!" Then, with a note of awe in her voice, she added: "In all the two years we have been here in Guiana I have seen only one other. And *that* one is in Doctor Floch's laboratory, safely imprisoned under cotton!"

I sprang to my feet. "I know what it is!" I boasted, as I stepped to her side to examine the thing more closely. "Yes, that's what it is, a *Rhodinus prolixus*! I saw the other one, yesterday, at the Institute."

Everyone now crowded around, to gaze with horror at the deadly insect.

Everyone, that is to say, except Captain Richard.

Impassive as usual, seemingly impervious to our babble of excited exclamations, he remained comfortably sprawled in his chair, his eyes serenely watching the smoke curling away from the tip of his cigar. And yet, by the narrowest of margins, he had just escaped a lingering death, too horrible to contemplate.

Confound the fellow, I should be afraid to sit with him in a game of poker!

## 8

WE ENTER SOCIETY

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AS LOREN TUTELL and I emerged from the Hôtel des Palmistes after having lounged in our rooms to escape the heat of the noon hours, a trim little car with a uniformed French soldier at its wheel came to a stop in front of us at the very instant we stepped from the door. From it emerged the erect lean figure of Captain Richard. His arrival seemed timed to the split second.

"Good day, gentlemen!" he said. "The Governor presents his compliments and asks if you would care to join him tomorrow afternoon for a little cruise on the Cayenne River in his launch. It occurs to him that it might afford a welcome moment of relief from this heat. And perhaps, also, you will wish to add to your pictures of Guiana some photographs of the scenes along the river. It flows between walls of jungle forests in which there is scarcely an inhabitant. May I tell the Governor to expect you?"

We accepted the invitation with alacrity, and as we stood chatting for a moment I heard, behind me, what was unmistakably an American voice. I wheeled about to see a young man wearing sunglasses just coming out of the hotel.

"Who's that?" I whispered to Captain Richard. "An American, isn't he?"

"But certainly," said Captain Richard. "A compatriot of yours. Have you not met M'sieu Harvey Blalock?"

Introductions were made, and I exclaimed, "This is a surprise! Tutell and I have been flattering ourselves we were the only Americans in this country."

"Well, you are, except for me," grinned Blalock, a friendly chap, to whom we took an instant liking. "I only just heard that you had arrived, and dropped in to say hello. I'm out in the jungle, you know, twenty-five kilometers from here, at the airport."

"Airport?" questioned Loren, puzzled. "You don't mean the P. A. landing pier on the river, do you? It didn't seem to me that that could be more than five miles from here."

"Oh, no, I don't mean our hydroplane base," said Blalock. "I'm referring to the new field, the one where the big liners are to land. It isn't finished; in fact it isn't really begun. We're still waiting for permission from the French Government to go ahead."

He grinned hopefully at Captain Richard, but that officer's poker face didn't respond in kind. Tutell and I, of course, didn't know what it was all about.

"Who is 'we'?" asked Loren. "Who's building this airport?"

"Pan-American," said Blalock. "I'm supposed to be in charge of the job. It's going to be a honey, when we get it done."

"Will that be soon?" I asked.

"Your guess is as good as mine," answered Blalock, somewhat ruefully, I thought. "They haven't given us the green light, so far. All we've been able to do is to clear away the bush. And if the go-ahead signal doesn't come from Vichy pretty soon, that's going to be just love's labor lost." He laughed. "Oh, well, how's about a drink? You too, of course, Captain Richard."

Captain Richard shook his head regretfully. "I am sorry," he said. "But I really must run along. Good-by, gentlemen, until tomorrow."

Our little Hôtel des Palmistes was very Parisian with its outdoor *terrasse*, and its strip of sidewalk facing the square, set with tables and chairs. The tables were already beginning to fill up with

citizens in white suits and black faces, but Blalock found a vacant one and signaled to a waiter to take our orders. The waiter was a white man, youngish, pleasant of countenance, with the shoulders of a varsity football player and the waist of a West Point cadet. He moved like an athlete, and looked as though he had never missed three square meals a day in all his life. When this Gene Tunney of a fellow had gone off to fetch our drinks, Blalock said:

"Now there's an interesting example, that waiter, of what this country can do for a man. That's Marcel. He recently finished a term of seven years as a convict. Now that he's a *libéré* he's got this job as a waiter. Just look at his physique! You're always hearing stories, you know, about the convicts dying off here like flies, because of starvation? Does Marcel look as though he has ever been starved? Why, he can lift you right off the ground in a handkerchief, with his teeth!"

"Not me," I said. "Nobody's going to lift Uncle Nicol off the ground in a handkerchief. Not without breaking a tooth."

"Oh, but I'm not kidding," protested Harvey Blalock. "This bird used to be tops in vaudeville, over in France, before they sent him up. They billed him as Marcel the Baker, the Strong Man of Europe. Get him to do his stuff for you, someday."

Just then the Strong Man of Europe came back with our drinks, and we fell silent. He forgot to wipe off the table, but I didn't want to mention it. When he had departed again, Loren observed:

"Don't ever tell me they starve 'em in French Guiana. Not if Marcel is a sample. Why, he looks as strong as an ox! They ought to advertise this place. 'Come to Devil's Island for a rest cure. Put on weight.'"

"I feel stronger already," I agreed, finishing my cocktail. "It must be something in the climate."

Blalock drew our attention to a somewhat undersized, non-

descript individual who was just then passing the *terrasse*, stolidly trudging along in the very middle of the street.

"Oh, there's Jeannot!" he exclaimed. "He's quite a character. He was an electrician by trade in Paris, before they sent him over here for his crime."

"What's criminal about being an electrician in Paris?" asked Loren.

"I don't mean that," said Blalock. "That wasn't what they convicted him of. But I wonder what he's doing on the street at this time of day. You don't usually see him around except in the morning."

"What is he, a milkman?" I asked.

"He's an electrician, I tell you. Come to think of it, it's very lucky for the city of Cayenne that he had a jealous disposition. Otherwise they might never have got him. He was just the man they needed. He goes around this town every morning to disconnect the wires for the lights, you know. They're never on in the daytime, here. It's really very fortunate for the city budget that Jeannot killed the man."

"Killed who?" demanded Loren, staring after Jeannot's retreating back.

"Oh, you haven't heard the story? Well, this happened in Paris, as so many things do. Jeannot was working away at his trade, happy as a lark, when he began to suspect that another electrician was fooling around with his wife. A man he knew, one who worked in the same powerhouse he did. At first he was only suspicious, then he became sure. He was being short-circuited, so to speak. His revenge was quite neat, absolutely the perfect crime. He killed the man, but not Sherlock Holmes himself could ever have suspected it was murder. It was all very ingenious, very simple. Our Johnny, after he had got the definite proof, merely waited for several weeks. He bided his time until it was his rival's

turn to relieve him on the job in the powerhouse. When the exact moment presented itself, as the man walked past him, Jeannot simply stuck out his foot and tripped him, so that he fell over a live high-tension wire and was instantly electrocuted. Johnny yelled, other workmen came running up, they shut off the current and dragged the corpse out, and that was all there was to it. It was perfectly plain that the man had stumbled, and that Jeannot had had nothing whatever to do with it. He wasn't even questioned by the police. So, it being quitting time, he washed his hands, put on his hat, and went peacefully home to his wife. Nobody ever guessed it was murder."

Blalock had evidently come to the end of the story. We stared at him, Loren and I.

"Hey, wait a minute," I protested. "How do you mean, nobody ever guessed it? He's here, isn't he? You don't mean that he went to the police of his own accord, do you, and gave himself up?"

"No," said Blalock patiently, "he didn't go to the police. He went home."

"Well, then!" exclaimed Loren belligerently. "How do you come to know all this, this washing his hands, and everything?"

"Oh, it all came out at the trial," answered Blalock, his eyes twinkling. "He *was* tried for murder, you know."

"But," I protested, in deeper than ever, "you've just told us that nobody ever suspected he killed the man!"

"Oh, that wasn't what he was tried for," said Blalock. "He was tried for something quite different. . . . After he washed his hands and went home to his wife, he cut her throat and yelled at the top of his lungs, till the police came and caught him redhanded. Say, what time is it, by the way? My watch has stopped."

"Just after six," I sighed. "Not going to leave us now, are you?"

"Well, I've got to go," said Blalock, "but if you fellows haven't

anything else on hand at the moment, why don't you come along with me? I'm sure you would be tremendously welcome. It's just a cocktail party, but I think you'll find the added feature a bit unusual."

"Oh, it's to be a double feature, is it?" I asked. "Will this be Bingo or Bank Night?"

"You'll see when you get there," was Blalock's smiling answer.

"You don't mean there are going to be some murderers present, do you?" asked Loren suspiciously. "A few more of these Strong Silent Waiters and overtime electricians, and I'll begin to believe anything can happen in this country."

"Oh, probably a couple of murderers," said Blalock reassuringly, "but they won't be there as guests, just as butlers."

"Oh, if *that's* all," said Loren, "what's keeping us back? Let's get going—I can't wait till the butler hands me my first arsenic cocktail!"

Blalock led the way. It was a walk of only a few blocks from our hotel. We turned down a delightful little side street, the rue Lieutenant Goinet, opening off from the far side of the Savane des Palmistes. The street was made colorful and gay by the tiny houses, set in gardens, no two of which were alike in color. Blue, yellow or red-brown, each sang a different tune, a dancing tune. We passed a garden wall of pink stone, with a great gate of delicate iron grillwork, over which rose a hedge of vivid green, and came to our destination.

"Hold on, Blalock," I said, as he was about to enter, "you haven't told us who is giving this cocktail party."

"Madame Deldez," he answered. "She is a woman of great charm, with a Demerara background."

"With a what?" exclaimed Loren. "What kind of a background?"

"Demerara, British Guiana," Blalock explained. "That means she was born a British colonial, and, I might add, that she has colored blood, although she doesn't look it."

"And what's this 'added feature' to be, at the party?" I asked.  
"You haven't told us that, either."

"Oh, it's to be not only a cocktail party but one at which the engagement of two young people is to be announced. I think you'll find something of the bizarre about these two. Let's go in."

If the other houses on the street had been colorful, the home of Madame Deldez was a veritable rainbow, or *pousse-café*. Three stories in height, the first floor was pale blue, the second canary yellow, and the third deep blue, the whole topped by a roof of corrugated iron painted bright red. In the yellow section, gray shutters in blue frames were pulled back. An outer stairs led to the second floor, where the main door was situated, and we ascended these steps. As we passed from the entrance hall to the drawing room, Madame Deldez greeted us.

She presented us to her two daughters, the elder a strikingly beautiful brunette, and to the three other guests in the room—a petite black girl named Jeannette, she whose engagement was about to be announced; her mother, a small caramel-colored matron; and her fiancé, a young French corporal, all white, scarcely out of his teens.

Our arrival seemed to be the signal for the ceremony to begin. Lukewarm champagne was passed, and panniers filled with delicious little cheese popovers. They were served by a white butler and a white footman, neither of whom looked like a man you would care to meet alone on a dark night. Their faces were those of prizefighters who had come to the end of unsuccessful careers. I've never seen servants anywhere else with expressions as hard-boiled as those. The footman in particular favored each guest with

a dirty look as he pushed the tray toward one. "Take a popover, or else—" he seemed to intimate. I wanted no argument. I took several. And so, I noticed, did Loren.

The ceremony was simple. The young Frenchman placed a ring on Jeannette's finger and a necklace of gold plaques about her neck, and that was all there was to it, except the kiss which they exchanged. But then, to my amusement, the bride-to-be stepped forward and pushed out her cheek for each one of us to kiss. I gave her a good peck. And thus, in the presence of the entire American colony—Blalock, Loren and I—the engagement was sealed.

I said to the mother of the promised, "I hope your daughter will be happy."

"Indeed, I also wish it, very much!" she replied with fervor. And, with an odd change in her voice, she added, slowly, "But in these uncertain times, who can tell? Perhaps she will be, perhaps not." She gave a little shrug to her shoulders. With the same motion, I am sure, she tried to disguise an effort to give a good hitch to her corset. It was apparent she wasn't accustomed to wearing one. It was hardly my place to ask. She went on: "All of life is such a gamble! And marriage in particular. *Ab, oui*, one can only hope!" Again she shrugged her caramel-brown shoulders. "My father was French," she added; though why she imparted this bit of information I haven't the faintest idea.

Perhaps she was thinking of the war, still so far away across the sea. Perhaps she was thinking of a war that had occurred in her childhood, and had been just as distant as this one, but had nevertheless reached out across the sea and taken her father—because he was French. Perhaps she was thinking that this present war would eventually reach out and take this little French soldier to whom she had just given her daughter. Perhaps—

But it was useless to wonder what was going on behind those dark eyes, unhappily trying to peer into a future which not even the sages can foretell.

There came the sound of laughing voices from the hallway, and the first of a large assortment of guests began pouring in. Our hostess went forward to greet them. The Mayor of Cayenne, Dr. Rivierez, entered, accompanied by his wife. They were followed by three or four young girls, in their late teens, apparently friends of the bride-to-be, Jeannette, and of our hostess' daughters. Then more and more guests arrived, until the drawing room was filled with people, all with some degree of dark color, or with some visible trace of Oriental ancestry. The Mayor was definitely dusky, and his wife was undoubtedly possessed of Chinese blood. I was introduced to her by Madame Deldez just as a rasping phonograph began to cough out a Viennese waltz. I asked Madame Rivierez if she cared to dance, and was pleasantly surprised by her grace, since she was quite on the plump side. When the record came to an end, we strolled into the dining room, where the plug-ugly menservants had spread the refreshments.

We seated ourselves at a table for two. Madame Rivierez took from her handbag a tiny fan. This she constantly fluttered, its airy lightness keeping time with her gaily fluttering conversation. She was dressed in excellent taste, in a yellow silk print. Her one ornament was a superb bracelet of yellow-gold American dollars, each one bearing the date 1859. I had never heard of these coins, and being fascinated by her piece of jewelry, I asked her if she could tell me where I might purchase one like it.

She winked at me, fluttering her fan even more vivaciously and thereby making the goldpieces jingle at her wrist. "What do you wish to pay, M'sieu Smeeth?" she asked coyly.

"Why, a dollar for each coin, of course," I replied jokingly.

"It is easy to see you are not an authority on numismatics," she smiled. "The book value of each of these coins is many times its face value."

"*Garçon! garçon!*" An imperious voice behind us interrupted our conversation, and we turned to see one of the darker-skinned ladies indignantly but vainly trying to summon one of the white footmen. "*Garçon!*" she repeated angrily, and then, turning to us and frowning in her exasperation, she exclaimed:

"I don't know what we shall do about this servant problem of ours! These *libérés* are all fools. They are not a bit like the ones we used to have. And with France no longer sending us any prisoners, whatever are we coming to?"

"But, madame," I protested, "you know of course that these men would leave, if they had the money. After all, since the *doublage* system is no longer in effect, your servant problem is only just beginning. Just think—in another generation or so, there won't be a convict left in Guiana. Then what will you do?"

"I know full well what is coming, m'sieu," she answered disagreeably, as she turned to stamp out of the room, "and I certainly do not need to be reminded of it!"

I glanced at Madame Rivierez, and we both laughed. Madame had the finest sense of humor in Cayenne.

How strange it was, I reflected, that in the great cities of the Far East I had heard white men yelling, "Boy! Boy!" at unhappy native waiters, while here, on the other side of the world, I was listening to a Negress employing the same word, and in the same tone, to a white man. Perhaps the balance had been struck; and in Cayenne it was time for some black Emerson to write a new essay on compensation.

As we were walking back to the hotel (still unpoisoned by the murderous butler), I remarked to Harvey Blalock, "Why were



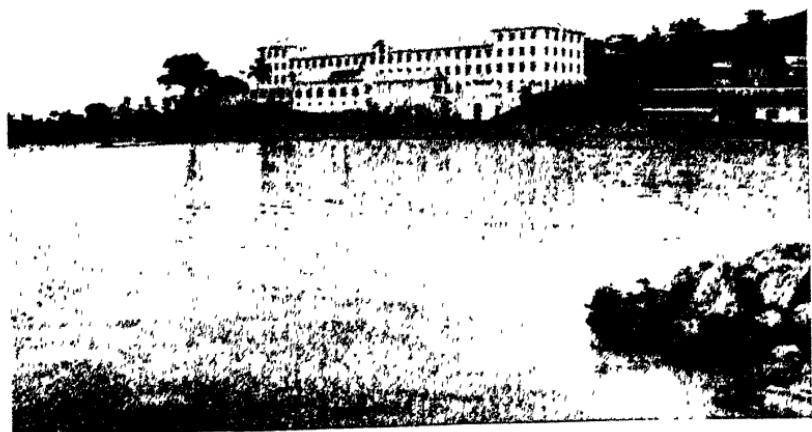
Governor Chot's country-place at Bourda, outside Cayenne



The jungle hemis in the Cayenne River, and the city itself



Governor Chot and Madame Chot in their launch, *l'Audacieuse*



The Caserne, barracks of Cayenne's Senegalese garrison



The *libérés* are men forgotten by France

we three Americans the only guests at the engagement-ring ceremony? After all, neither that girl's mother nor Madame Deldez has known you very long, has she? And as for Loren and me, we hadn't met her before, and she couldn't even have known we were coming!"

Blalock chuckled. "Oh, but you don't understand," he said. "To have the whole American Colony as witnesses—why, that's the very height of social attainment!"

"You had it all to yourself, didn't you, before we arrived?" said Loren, in a tone of envy.

Blalock just grinned.

The river trip on the Governor's launch the next afternoon was exceedingly pleasant. The scenery, the tall green forests that seemed as if they had stood unchanged since the world's beginning, flowed past us soothingly as we ascended the broad stream. Deep jungle came down to the water's edge, and now and then a snow-white heron, a rose plumaged flamingo, or an immense blue butterfly circled overhead. The river breeze stirred the blue, white and red tricolor of France, floating at the taffrail of the launch. Madame Chot hummed an old French boating song as the miles sped by. We were cool, for the first time since our arrival.

We saw no one, through all that afternoon, except once. Just before we reached the Pan-American landing stage, we heard the hum of another engine and saw the boat approaching us. Shortly the little outboard motor launch came alongside. Its one occupant was the Pan-American radio operator, who has been stationed there for the past ten years. With a smile, he handed up an envelope to the Governor, who tore it open and read its contents at a glance.

"It is good news, is it not?" asked the beaming operator.

"Yes," said Governor Chot. "Good news." Then turning to me he explained:

"Word has come at last from Martinique. Pan-American may now commence the actual building of the inland airport. Mr. Blalock will be most happy."

That evening Harvey Blalock and I celebrated the momentous news with the aid of a quart of champagne. America's line of airports from Florida to the hump of Brazil—each one an essential link in a chain of defense—would now be complete.

We were perhaps premature in our toasts, I'm afraid. What was it that the little caramel-colored lady had said?

"All of life is such a gamble!"

## 9

A CAPTAIN OF CUTTHROATS

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THIS was a story told me in private by a gentleman whom I met at Madame Deldez' cocktail party. He didn't give it to me there—but afterward, at his own house, with the door closed.

At the party, I had happened to remark in his hearing that the scene was a delightful one, and that I had been charmed by the people to whom I had been presented.

"Ah," said he, "it is too bad that you did not get here in time to meet Captain Claude Chandon!"

"But I thought I was the first to arrive!" I exclaimed. "Don't tell me someone else had already come and gone!"

He smiled. "No, I mean that it is regrettable that you did not arrive in this colony while Captain Chandon was still here. You would have found him a fascinating chap. If he were in Cayenne at this moment he would be the center of attention, you may be sure."

"Has he returned to France?" I asked politely.

My friend lowered his voice. "No one knows where he is," he said mysteriously. "See here, you're a writer, are you not? You should hear the story of Captain Chandon. But this isn't just the place to tell it. Suppose you come to my house, some evening at your convenience? We can talk more freely there."

He had aroused my curiosity, and I accepted his invitation. Some days later I knocked at his door and, as he had promised, was told the story. I am quite sure that until now it has never been published.

"This Captain Claude Chandon," he began, "entered the army at the very beginning of the first World War, twenty-seven years ago. He was young, he was burning with patriotism, and he made a brilliant military record. For his feats of heroism in leading his men he was decorated with the medal of the Legion of Honor and the Croix de Guerre. Not France alone honored him—he is one of an extremely small number of foreigners who have been awarded that supreme honor which England has to bestow upon the valorous, the Victoria Cross.

"When the World War was over, he went back into civilian life. He saved a little money, but he didn't become rich. Finally, about a dozen years ago, he decided to emigrate to French Guiana to seek his fortune, and purchased a banana plantation. He soon found that he didn't have enough capital with which to employ the necessary labor and to develop the plantation, and was forced to borrow. He went to the Bank of Guiana, here in Cayenne, and offered a mortgage on his plantation, as security. The bank took the mortgage and advanced the money.

"From the first, Captain Chandon was lionized, as I hinted to you the other afternoon, by the most important people in this little city. As you know, although this is the capital of the colony, we have a population of little more than ten thousand, and of this total number scarcely a hundred persons are of pure French blood. Everyone came to know Claude Chandon, everyone liked and admired him. He was not only a hero of the war, he was handsome, intelligent, an excellent storyteller, an eagerly desired dinner guest.

"But, popular as he was, he was not equally fortunate in business. His plantations were not successful. Year after year he was obliged to borrow more money to continue. Within a few years the Bank of Guiana was so heavily involved in the venture that it

could not withdraw its support. Two years ago, Captain Chandon's borrowings had amounted to eight hundred thousand francs. He still owes that amount.

"Well, then, on the third day of September, 1939, France and England declared war on Germany. Figure to yourself what this meant to Captain Chandon!

"He was, of course, an officer in the Army Reserve Corps of France, and, as such, would hold himself in readiness for instant service. He had shown his courage magnificently in the first war. Now he talked of nothing except of the day when again he should be called to help defend his beloved country. But that call never came.

"As you may well imagine, this city, Cayenne, is as prone to idle talk and prejudice as any other small town. As the first months of the war went on and Chandon was not summoned to France, the opinion here began to divide itself into two camps. One, made up of the few who disliked Chandon, whispered that it was no wonder that he wished to get into active service, since he was so heavily in debt to the bank. If he were called to the front, it would mean to him a long postponement of his day of reckoning, or perhaps a complete escape. His financial position had become so dangerously precarious that the war, to Claude Chandon, must seem like a miraculous gift from heaven, as wonderful as a last-minute reprieve to a condemned man.

"His friends indignantly denied this slur. Captain Chandon, they said hotly, was an honest man, a soldier without fear, a patriot without self-interest. There was no room in his soul for any other thought than one—that he must serve France!

"Whatever his inward feelings, Chandon never got the chance to fight upon the soil of France while it was still the unconquered. While his old comrades in France, luckier than he, took up arms,

he remained a helpless watcher from afar, listening in vain through the long weary months for the summons that never arrived. For when the Germans struck at last, with their full force, they struck so swiftly that there was no time to rally help. Chandon could not believe the news. France had fallen!

"Tears of helpless fury came into his eyes. The war all over? And he had been given no chance to strike even one blow?

"He ran around this town like a madman. 'Is there no way in which we can carry on the fight?' he demanded. 'Is there nothing we can do?'

"His friends were as broken-hearted as he. But they answered grimly: 'What can we do? Weygand has surrendered. Pétain has surrendered. They are our superior officers. They command us to accept their decision. What can we do but obey?'

"But then came the news that General Charles de Gaulle had escaped to England and was trying to rally the Free French to continue the fight. Chandon was overjoyed. '*Vive La France!*' he cried. He hurried to the Caserne.

"You have seen the Caserne, of course? It is that imposing group of buildings, fort and barracks together, which houses the entire military strength of Cayenne. Do not smile. There are, at the Caserne, three or four hundred black Senegalese soldiers, commanded by French officers. They are savage fighters. It was Captain Chandon's idea that if these officers and their men were willing to serve under De Gaulle, he would join them at once. But again his hopes were beaten down as quickly as they had flamed up.

"Word that Chandon was seeking to arouse sympathy for the Free French cause was brought immediately to Governor Chot. You have met Governor Chot. You know, then, that he is just as brave a man, just as loyal to France, as Captain Chandon could possibly be. He, too, like Chandon, served as a soldier of France

in the first World War. He, too, had been awarded the Croix de Guerre for bravery under fire. But, unlike Chandon, he believed that a soldier's first duty is to obey the orders given him. When Pétain commanded all officers of France, civil and military, to accept the terms of surrender, Governor Chot held it to be his duty to obey his superior officer. Make no mistake—Governor Chot is as brave and as honest a man as the world holds.

"Being informed of Captain Chandon's attitude, Governor Chot was troubled. He could not permit this to continue. But what was to be done about him?

"The Governor finally decided to send Chandon on a mission of no importance to St. Laurent, merely to get him out of this city and away from the Caserne.

"As you know, St. Laurent is the seat of the largest penal camp in French Guiana. It is not situated upon an island in the Atlantic, as are the prison camps on those three small islands known as *Les Iles de Salut*—Devil's Island, St. Joseph and Ile Royale. It is inland, on the banks of the Maroni River, which is the dividing line between this colony and Dutch Guiana. There is still another penal camp, that of Inini, on the Cayenne River. But of all the five, St. Laurent is much the largest.

"A sizable semi-military force is maintained there, known as the *Surveillantes Militaires*, chiefly for the purpose of guarding the convicts; but there are also some slight fortifications at the place, erected God knows when or why. Governor Chot was perfectly well aware that these puerile fortifications had been placed in as good order as possible, but he made the excuse of sending Captain Chandon to see if this were so.

"This was in June of last year, immediately after the collapse of France. Captain Chandon saluted the governor and departed on his mission. And, arriving at St. Laurent, he began to question

the *Surveillantes Militaires* as to what they thought about throwing in their lot with General de Gaulle! Apparently they were unsympathetic. At any rate, he came back to Cayenne in two weeks, duly made his report to the Governor, and subsided into quiet—for about a month.

"He had made one friend in St. Laurent. This was a man named Walchenheim, an Alsatian, the son of a former French official in the colony who had long since gone back to Europe. Years ago, Walchenheim's mother had been mysteriously murdered near St. Laurent. The son, brooding over her death, became obsessed with the strange notion that if the convict camp had never been established there, his mother would still be alive. If he had had the power to wipe out the place utterly, he would have done so.

"At any rate, having gained no more recruits for De Gaulle than this one half-demented man, who was respected more by the Indians of the jungle than by the white *fonctionnaires*, Captain Chandon apparently gave up his efforts to enlist men against Germany from this colony. A month after his return from St. Laurent he disappeared from Cayenne completely.

"Before his departure, he had announced that he was starting on a gold-hunting trip along the Mana River into the jungles of the interior. But he did not go there. He crossed the Mana, continued on to St. Laurent, where he again saw Walchenheim, and there crossed the Maroni River into Dutch Guiana. He had his passport and met no difficulty.

"Not much news of him came back to Cayenne during the six or seven months that followed. It was rumored here that after an Indian hired by Walchenheim had landed him in a dugout canoe at Albina, on the Dutch side of the Maroni, Captain Chandon had hurried on to Paramaribo and there had held a long and secret

conference with the Dutch Governor. From Paramaribo, it was said, he had taken the little coastwise steamer to Georgetown, in British Guiana; and from Georgetown he had gone on to Trinidad, which is likewise British. But nothing definite was heard from him, and as the months went on people here began to believe that French Guiana would never see him again.

"You have visited St. Laurent, yes? Well, you know that at that great prison camp, in addition to the several thousand convicts who are still serving their sentences under guard, there are perhaps two or three hundred *libérés* hanging about the camp? You know them—convicts who have served their terms and are technically free to go anywhere they please. Except, poor devils, that they haven't passports and couldn't go to any other country, even if they had the money. There is no guard over them, but they've no place else to go; they're like homeless dogs that have been kicked out but still hang cringing around the back door.

"Two or three hundred of these fellows are at St. Laurent! You know, of course, that the Government doesn't supply funds for their support, and never has? They live on what they can pick up. The Salvation Army helps them out a little. They go around gathering scraps, refuse, anything they can find. They can't obtain work, who is there to give it to them? They are worse off than their former comrades, the convicts still under the rifles of the guards. France? France is three thousand miles away, too far to see them. France has forgotten them, long ago. She has washed her hands of them.

"Perhaps you are wondering why I speak of these ragged, wolfish ghosts, these creatures whose very existence has been forgotten by the mother who bore them. We were talking about Chandon. You are right, such scum as these should never be named in the same breath with a soldier like Chandon, an officer who has

never committed any crime, with a reputation so splendid that France herself has saluted him. They are worlds apart. On one side, man at his highest; on the other, man at his lowest.

"And yet Captain Claude Chandon did not think so.

"On the night of February 5, 1941, at an hour when ordinarily these miserable shadows of men would have crept to their holes for sleep, an amazing but noiseless activity awoke along the shores of the wide river that flows past the prison camp of St. Laurent. One by one, stealthy figures stole through the darkness to an agreed rendezvous. They were like the hungry beasts of the jungle, that make no sound. By twos and threes, now a dozen of them, now twenty, now fifty . . . and finally one hundred and thirty of these flitting shadows had assembled. You would have said that here was a company of infantry, at full war-time strength. . . .

"In the near-by prison camp, which was dimly lighted, a sleepy guard hailed one of these scarecrows as he was stealing by.

"'Hola, Jean,' he yawned. 'And where goest thou, little one, at this hour?'

"The man drew himself up. 'I cross the river,' he answered boldly and proudly. 'I go to be free!'

"The guard laughed, good-naturedly. 'As you say,' he answered. 'They will only send you back, those Dutch. You will have only your swim, for your pains—if the *piranha* do not get you. But it is not my affair. Go, if it pleases you.'

"The *libéré* strode on.

"In a few minutes more, the dark shapes of canoes coming from the Dutch side approached the riverbank where the one hundred and thirty men were huddled. They were long canoes, empty except for a native or two who paddled each one. The Indians beached them and stood ready.

"'Are all here?'

"The man who asked that question was not clothed in tatters,

like the others. He wore the smartly tailored uniform of an officer in the Army of France. On its tunic were fastened the ribands which none but the bravest have won—the emblems of Croix de Guerre and Victoria Cross.

“‘All are here, *mon capitaine*,’ whispered Walchenheim.

“‘Very good,’ answered the other. ‘*Allons!*’

“The *libérés* entered the boats—this band of former cutthroats, thieves and murderers, led that night by one man, who never in his life had drawn a breath which was not that of a free man.

“The silent flotilla moved out into midstream, in the enshrouding darkness. It is said that the guards at St. Laurent heard strange noises that night, music on the river, the sound of men’s voices, singing. Hoarse voices these were, fierce and exultant, screaming that terrifying marching-song of unconquerable France, that song that was first sung when all France was a land of famished and naked scarecrows, like these who sang it now:

“‘*Allons, enfants de la patrie, la jour de gloire est arrivée!*’

“M’sieu, that was a crossing!

“Never in all the seventy years since France first began sending her condemned men to this colony had such a bolt for freedom by so many men together been dreamed of. An escape by one or two at a time, perhaps even half a dozen—but nothing on such a scale as this, never! Captain Chandon had laid his plans well. He must have prepared the groundwork when he made his first visit to St. Laurent. Then, a month later, after he had set out on that imaginary search for gold, he had visited St. Laurent a second time, and again seen Walchenheim. He went on from there to interview the authorities, Dutch and British, in Paramaribo, in Georgetown and in Trinidad. He was patient and unrelenting in his grim determination never to cease until he had struck a blow for France, beaten to her knees though she was. He could do nothing else. He did this.”

For the first time since my host had begun the amazing narrative, I interrupted with a question. "Then they really got away?" I demanded, incredulously.

"Oh, yes," he replied. "Even if the embarkation had been discovered, I doubt if a shot would have been fired by the guards. They are under no orders to watch over the *libérés*, you know. And yet if Captain Chandon's purpose had been uncovered it would have been the duty of the *Surveillantes Militaires* to fire. For all who join the forces of De Gaulle have been proclaimed by Vichy to be traitors to France, deserving of execution."

He smiled. "There was a rather amusing scene when those desperate ex-convicts marched into Paramaribo," he added. "There were ladies there, gentle old ladies, I am sure, who had up to that time been knitting mufflers for the benefit of Dutch refugees in England. When they saw these ragged and barefoot Frenchmen, some of them were convinced that they would soon be murdered in their beds! But as soon as they found that the men were on their way to join De Gaulle, the good old souls hurried to find shoes for the bare feet and clothing for the naked shoulders. And then they sat themselves down again and began knitting socks for these cutthroats, mufflers for murderers!"

"And did these men ever reach the front?" I asked.

"I do not know," my host answered. "But I am advised that they got safely to Trinidad at any rate, having been sent back neither by the Dutch nor by the English. The last I heard of them—and of Captain Claude Chandon—was a rumor that they had set sail from Trinidad in March, in a British troopship bound for Suez.

"Perhaps they have died since them, in free air, under the tricolor. France, which had struck them from the list of her sons, ought not to grudge them that."

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# 10

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## CUSTOMS GUARD IN GUIANA

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ART DUYSTER leaned across the hotel table and handed me a photograph. I gazed with horror at the mutilated form of a man.

"What in the world happened to this fellow?" I exclaimed.

"He was a smuggler, a one-time native of St. Lucia," replied the general manager of the gold mining company at Lawa, the largest concern of its kind on the river boundary between French and Dutch Guiana.

"Smuggling what?" I demanded.

"Cognac," Duyster answered. "You see, in French Guiana liquor can be bought for practically nothing. In Dutch Guiana, it fetches a much higher price, so anyone who can smuggle it from the French to the Dutch side of the Maroni is certain to make a nice profit. There is a Dutch Customs officer at Lawa whose job it is to collect duties on all liquors brought into camp openly from across the river. But when a big holiday is approaching and three hundred workers want alcohol, it's mighty little revenue that he collects."

"What's this camp like, where the smuggling took place?"

"It's on the site of the original *Compagnie des Mines d'Or*, a large gold development project of the 1880's. The houses of the camp come down to within four or five meters of the water's edge, leaving a cleared embankment at the river. It was along this embankment that I walked on one particular night in late October a year or so ago. It was almost midnight and not a light was showing in any of the huts. The men had apparently been asleep for

hours. There was a full moon, but as heavy clouds were drifting across the sky, the river was completely obscured from time to time, shrouded in inky darkness.

"I carried a loaded rifle, for I was looking for trouble. I was expecting it. The natives always celebrate these religious holidays with dancing and all the drinks they can manage to down, and the holiday was to begin the following day. Of course the smugglers never come on the day itself, but they slip across the river for at least forty-eight hours before it. I had been warned that they were operating, and they undoubtedly expected to make their biggest haul this particular evening.

"You see we pay our men in Dutch currency for the gold they bring in, but the smugglers won't take guilders; they want the gold itself. They had been receiving it, that we knew, for there was a shortage. The gold is weighed in every week from the placers scattered through the jungle, along the creeks in the concession area. In the week before this big holiday it had fallen off half a kilo. That added up on a basis of two kilos a month, or twenty-five percent of the total intake, which is a distinct loss. I had my factual proof in this shortage. It was a serious matter.

"I had scarcely started along the riverbank from my own house when I thought I saw the shadowy outline of a boat moving slowly, with muffled paddles, in toward the shore. I stopped and watched. It was a corial, about twenty feet in length, riding rather low in the water, so I assumed it was heavily loaded.

"Without making a sound, I advanced until I was only ten or fifteen meters distant. The bow of the canoe had no more than touched shore when several dark figures, men whose faces I couldn't distinguish in the darkness, appeared from nowhere and began helping the lone boatman to unload the cases of cognac. I let them land several boxes before I shouted: 'Stop, who goes there?'

"That was an error, for I should have fired without speaking. The laborers melted away like shadows. But I wanted to catch the smuggler red-handed before he could get away with his gold. Even as I had shouted he bent over to snatch up something, then stood up to dive overboard. I fired.

"I must have missed, for he started out with vigorous strokes for the opposite bank. I fired again into the murky night, although I could not see him now. The sound of my shots brought the camp policeman running. The river is not very wide up there, and before we could have launched a boat he would be across.

"The guard and I immediately inspected the abandoned corial. He pointed out a splattering of blood along the gunnel, so my first bullet must have winged the smuggler; but it could have been little more than a flesh wound, for, even as we searched for the gold that wasn't there, the smuggler was making progress across the water, still swimming strongly.

"I was about to call it a night and had said as much to the watchmen, when suddenly unearthly screams shattered the quiet. They came from the middle of the river. The cries were blood-curdling, they froze us in our tracks. They sounded like the shrieks of a man being slowly torn into shreds, and they lasted for several minutes. Just before they ceased abruptly we saw lights moving out from the French shore and realized that the smuggler's friends were coming to his rescue. They spent more than an hour looking for him, their lights moving over the surface of the black water like giant fireflies. But they didn't find him, for they were at it again in the morning."

Duyster paused for a moment to take a long drag on his cigarette, languidly watching the curling rings of smoke that drifted from his nostrils.

"Just about opposite where the smuggler's boat had landed," he went on, "several large boulders jut out of the water. The swift

current, flowing around them, often forms a whirlpool, several feet in depth. The following morning, one of the natives living on the concession was fishing in midstream, not far from these rocks. Intent upon his line, he looked up suddenly and found his canoe was drifting dangerously close to the whirlpool. He seized his paddle and began backing water as quickly as he could when he saw, shooting up out of the vortex, a ghastly cadaver. It came up head first. Circling after the head, as it whirled about, swam half a dozen piranha, the man-eating fish of Guiana's rivers.

"As you can see," Duyster observed, referring again to the photograph he had handed me, "only one side of the smuggler's head had been attacked. The right side of his face and ear were gone and his right hand; the rest of his body was untouched."

"Are you sure this was the smuggler?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, the body was eventually disgorged by the whirlpool and washed ashore. Laborers who knew him identified him.

"Judging from the blood we found in his canoe, my bullet must have scratched his neck just as he dived into the water. The wound was probably so slight he didn't even notice it. But the piranha are attracted by blood in water. Even a microscopic drop is enough to draw them. As you know, although they are hardly more than a foot long they have razor-sharp teeth and, swimming in schools as they do, they are more dangerous than sharks. I suppose the smuggler had almost reached the boulders in mid-stream when they attacked him. That's probably when we heard his cries. He must have been drawn into the whirlpool; and that's why his friends couldn't find him immediately."

"But from this photograph it appears that the fish attacked him in two different parts of his person," I commented. "I think, Mr. Duyster, that you are a better shot than you realize. In fact, it seems you are a wonderful shot."

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# 11

## "AU REVOIR ET MERCI"

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*"Toujours la vérité—pas toute la vérité, mais rien que la vérité."*

"Always the truth—not *all* the truth, but nothing except the truth!" I translated. It was Governor Chot who had smilingly pronounced the French phrase.

"Yes, my friend, I find that a maxim which is pretty safe to follow," he went on. "If you stick to that advice, you are not likely to get yourself involved too much."

"I should like to use that in describing you!" I exclaimed. "That is, if you do not object, Governor? It is so characteristic!"

"No, you have my permission," he smiled, "if you think they are words of sufficient wisdom." He turned toward his wife. "Isn't breakfast ready yet, my dear?"

"Yes, Robert," Madame Chot replied. "We shall have the bread, the sausage and the red wine immediately. The boy is preparing the table now."

"I hope, Mr. Smith, you are as hungry as I am," said the Governor. "When one has risen at half-past four in the morning, surely it is time to eat by seven!"

We were on the deck of the Governor's launch, *L'Audacieuse*. Early as it was, we had already passed the fishing poles of the Indo-Chinese village at the broad mouth of the Cayenne River and were entering Crique Anguille—some thirty miles from the coast and well into the heart of the tropical jungle. Port Inini, which was to be our point of debarkation, is on the very edge of the

vast territory called Inini. Inini remains an area of South America in which there are more square miles marked "Unexplored" than in any possession in French Africa. For French Guiana remains today, to the white man, merely a coastal strip where dwell the convicts.

We went below, breakfasted and arrived at Port Inini by eight. M. Echard, *chef-du-poste* of the Indo-Chinese penal camp which we were about to visit, met us on the pier.

The *Pénitencier*, as it is called, of Crique Anguille, is a name meaning nothing to the reader who has heard only of "Devil's Island," which term is applied loosely to cover all the convict camps of French Guiana. Nevertheless, it is the most interesting of them all. In the colony, there are two types of camps, the *pénitencier* and the *bagne*, the employment camp and the prison. The *bagne*, the prison, is for the hardened criminal—while in the *pénitencier* are to be found "political" prisoners, Communists and a few thieves. At the *Pénitencier* of Crique Anguille all of the one hundred and seventy-five prisoners are Orientals, from France's possessions in Indo-China. There are no white prisoners, as the Orientals are kept segregated.

At the pier, we climbed into a very ancient Ford and set off over an incredibly muddy road, blood red as the back-country roads of our own South. A ride of ten or fifteen minutes brought us to a clearing in the jungle forest alongside the road, in which some thirty Oriental convicts were at work. Some of them were operating a modern tractor which was being used to pull up the stumps of trees that had been felled. Others were cutting up a fallen giant trunk with a double-ended saw. Echard told us it was a batala tree, or Guiana redwood. On the opposite side of the road was another clearing, in which grazed a herd of cows and goats. Neither the lumbermen nor the cattle favored us with the slightest glance while we watched them.

All the men were clothed in jacket and trousers of blue cotton, seemingly of lighter weight than denim.

“Why don’t these men wear the regulation pink and white striped suits that are worn by all the other convicts I’ve seen in Cayenne?” I asked the overseer.

“Because they are political prisoners,” answered Echard. “That gang over there, for instance”—and he indicated a dozen or so who were working side by side—“all were members of the famous murder conspiracy of Yen-Bay, who in 1928——”

“You don’t mean Yen-Bay in Tonkin, in northern Indo-China?” I interrupted.

“Why, yes, that’s the place,” said Echard. “Do you know about it?”

“I’ve visited it several times,” I replied. “That’s where the wholesale assassinations took place, isn’t it? It was by poisoning, wasn’t it, that these Annamites disposed of the French officials and their wives and even their children?”

“That’s it,” said the *chef-du-poste*. “Never before or since, in all the history of France’s colonizations, has there been murder planned on such a large scale.”

“But, great heavens!” I exclaimed, as I stared at the stolid Oriental faces of the prisoners around us, “how could the authorities be sure that each one of these men was guilty, and not merely a tool for some higher-up?”

“They were all members of one cult, it was shown,” said Echard, “and every man who belonged to that organization had sworn to perform his special role in the murders, or else submit to being murdered himself.”

“Well, I don’t envy you your job,” I told him. “How long have you held it?”

“Oh, I’ve been here for about fifteen years,” Monsieur Echard answered, “and most of that time with these men.”

"They don't look as if you had been too hard on them," I said, and meant it. "They certainly don't seem a starved lot."

"Most assuredly not!" said Echard emphatically. "All of them are better fed at the present time than are my own people in France, occupied or unoccupied. *Voilà*, here comes their mid-morning meal right now! Just see for yourself what they are given to eat. They get this twice a day."

A man who looked like any coolie in China was coming up with two enormous baskets, suspended from a pole carried across his shoulders. The baskets were heaped high with food. One was completely full of cooked rice, the other was filled to the brim with casseroles containing shrimps, pork, string beans, corned beef and stews of meat mixed with fish. It was obvious that the convicts were a long way from starvation rations.

"Hey, hold it till I set up my camera!" exclaimed Loren. "That's a picture for the book!"

While he was taking the photograph the Governor remarked: "Yes, they fare quite well, as you see. Do you realize that each man is allotted six hundred grams of rice, two hundred grams of meat, and five hundred grams of vegetables every day? M'sieu Echard speaks truly when he tells you that the convict in Guiana is better fed than his brother citizen in France."

"Yes, that is so," nodded Echard. "And on Sundays, if they are good, they may have even more."

"How do you mean, 'good'?" I asked.

"I mean that if they have given satisfaction during the preceding week, they are allowed on Sundays to fish and to hunt."

"What sort of game do they find to shoot?" asked Loren, replacing his camera in the Ford.

"Oh, wild pig, agouti, pakira, deer and any number of birds of various species. There's plenty of everything. It all depends on how lucky they are."



At Inini Convict Camp: M. Echard, Chef-du-Poste (second from left); Governor Chot and Captain Richard; an Indo-Chinese convict squatted at their feet



The convicts consider a boa-constrictor a delicacy



The convicts' mid-morning meal is brought to them in baskets.



The Sloth at the Cayenne Zoo slept upside down



The "trusties" work about three hours a day, earning three cents

“You have to accompany them of course, don’t you?” I observed. “That is, to make sure that they don’t escape?”

“Escape?” laughed Echard. “Where would they go? The jungle is everywhere the same. It is extremely dense. It would take a man hours to go one kilometer. There are, of course, no roads, and seldom even a trail, and that for only a little way. No, they wander off by themselves, and when it is time to return they come in quietly. Once in a while, one or two of them will absent themselves for a short period. That is when they have teamed up with some *libéré* who has been granted a concession in the deep jungle, from the Government.”

“Concession?” I echoed. “What for?”

“To cut rare woods,” he explained. “As I say, the *libéré* gets the concession, and then he employs these men to do the cutting. In payment, he gives them simple supplies, such as tobacco, besides their food. However, we always know pretty well where they are, and if we want them badly enough we can easily go after them and bring them back.”

“But, hold on a minute,” said Loren. “After the wood is cut, how in the world does the *libéré* get it down to his market in Cayenne? He can’t let his ‘employees’ show their faces down there, can he?”

“Oh, he arranges with other *libérés* doing the same work, and they co-operate by floating it all downstream.”

The convicts had gathered to eat their meal, as we were talking. Echard smiled reminiscently as we watched them.

“An amusing incident happened last night,” he explained. “A fourteen-foot boa constrictor entered one of their huts. They thought the big snake was a gift from heaven! They killed it, skinned it, and added its meat to that of their regular dinner.”

“I once read in *L’Illustration* of some gourmets in Paris,” I remarked, “who gathered at a banquet at which the *pièce de résis-*

tance was a roast made from a live python. It had been sent them from Indo-China. You don't suppose one of these fellows here was the chef at that banquet, do you?"

Echard smiled. "No, that would be a little too much of a coincidence," he observed. "I'm afraid we shall have to leave that to the fiction writers!"

"At any rate," said Loren, "these fellows certainly make use of everything that comes their way, don't they? Stewed boa constrictor, my gosh!"

"Yes, they do," Echard agreed. "And sometimes a good bit that *doesn't* come their way. They go out to meet it more than halfway. For instance, the one we now call The Potato Boy. You know, we lock these fellows up in their huts every night. But this one, the Potato Boy, set to work with a penknife and managed to loosen two boards from the wall of his hut, so that he could slip out at any time, unobserved. He would steal a twenty-five-pound sack of potatoes from the camp commissary and lug it the four miles to Port Inini, where he would sell it to the *libérés*. The next morning he would be back on the job, working as hard as any of his fellow prisoners. We didn't discover his thieving for some time, because he was shrewd enough to steal the potatoes only when there was a large supply of them on hand. In this manner he had managed to put aside a tidy sum in francs, toward the day when he would be able to return to Tonkin. The Oriental never remains a *libéré* for very long—he is much more ingenious in finding ways to earn his return passage than is the convict from France. They are all smart merchants and traders by instinct."

"M'sieu Echard," the Governor smiled, "have you ever heard the story of Doctor Brousse and his two Oriental servants? It's quite a tale, and it bears out your contention. The Doctor's duties sent him all over this country, even to some of the most remote

gold placer camps in the interior. The two servants he took along, to paddle the canoe up the rivers, weren't satisfied to rest when they weren't paddling. They spent every minute in fishing. And then they carried their catches overland to all the placer camps the Doctor visited. The miners paid them for the fresh fish in gold dust. As soon as they got back to the coast, they used this gold in buying stocks of canned goods, which they took with them on the next journey they made into the wilds, and sold these to the miners, again for gold. Thus they were constantly pyramiding their profits; and by the time they came to the end of their terms as *libérés*, they had salted away one hundred and fifty thousand francs! They sailed back to Indo-China with fortunes that were enough to support them for the rest of their lives!”

As Governor Chot was telling this anecdote we were walking toward the large barn which was both the repair shop for the tractors and the storehouse for food. We passed a meadow. Rice was growing in it, the tall green stalks springing luxuriously from the rich wet soil.

The Governor called our attention to the rice. “They said it would never grow here!” he chuckled. “But I told them that if it will grow in Brazil and in the Surinam it would here, too. And it has. That rice was planted only six months ago, and look at it! We're getting a hundred tons this year. Next season, the crop will double itself. And it won't be very long before the entire twelve hundred tons that the convicts consume each year will be grown right here in the colony. So far, it's had to be imported, you know.”

“What variety of rice is it?” I asked idly.

“Dzina,” he replied. “The same that's grown in Dutch Guiana. There's no better.”

It was eleven o'clock when we finally climbed the hillside

steps leading to the home of M. Echard, where we were to lunch. Our host produced excellent rum cocktails, and as the Governor's launch had brought some ice from Cayenne, they were chilled deliciously. We downed a superb caramel soufflé and were sipping our liqueurs when the Governor remarked:

"Echard, you've been here for many years, and have had dozens of experiences. But I think there is one that you tell better than all the rest."

"Which one is that, Governor?" Echard asked.

"*'Au revoir et merci,'*" said the Governor, laughing. "Tell it to our friends from the United States."

Echard leaned back in his chair comfortably, his sinewy brown arms folded across his chest, and began the tale.

"Several years ago, when I went into Cayenne from the forest, for a visit, I heard almost immediately after my arrival that the Governor was going to give a ball—not this Governor, gentlemen, but one of his predecessors, long since departed. Well, in those days a ball at the palace was a most unusual thing for Cayenne and the colony."

"There had never been one before, had there?" prompted Governor Chot.

"Not to my memory, sir," replied Echard. "And so, as you can well imagine, the whole of Cayenne was agog. The affair was to be held, of course, in Government House, the old palace that the Jesuits built more than a century ago. Who was to be invited and who was to be left out was, of course, the question on every tongue. At last the lucky ones received their invitations. And now the only question left to trouble the minds of those who had been bidden was, where is the Governor going to get his orchestra for the dance? Cayenne is not a city with a surplus of orchestras. In fact, I doubt if it has even one good one. So the Governor turned to *le Bagne*, the prison."

"That hardly surprises even me," I interrupted. "We have regularly practicing orchestras in most of our big penitentiaries—although, I must say, they don't hire out."

"Ah, but M'sieu Smith," Echard objected, "you must surely realize that your prisons are very different from those of Cayenne. In your country, an orchestra can be completely assembled from the talent to be found under one prison roof; but here in Guiana the artists are scattered about in various small encampments, and there is scant opportunity for them to come together so that they may rehearse their repertoires under one conductor, as they should."

"However, the convicts who were chosen to play in the orchestra were permitted, by special dispensation, many hours of practicing before the great day, which provided them with a wonderful excuse for avoiding the drudgery of their ordinary daily routine, and they were as excited as children given a holiday from school."

"Finally the night of the ball came. Now it so happened that the *Surveillant* in charge of the prison where the assembled orchestra was being housed had not been invited to the Governor's ball. His wife was sorely disappointed. She, however, being a woman of ideas and spirit, had resolved to make the best of it, by inviting ten or twenty friends—none of whom had received invitations—to attend a little party at her house in the prison grounds that same evening.

"Her guests arrived at her house at the hour appointed, which was some two hours earlier than that at which the more fortunate people would be gathering at the palace. She had scarcely welcomed the latecomers when there was a knock, and she followed her husband to the door, to see who this might be. It was one of the convict musicians, who had come to ask the *Surveillant* if the band might not leave the prison and proceed to the palace, in order to tune up their instruments. The *Surveillant's* wife, peeking over his shoulder, pouted prettily and exclaimed:

" 'Oh, dear, the Governor's going to have all the music, and we shan't have any! But why can't we have some first? The musicians could very well tune their instruments and play a number or two for us, right here in our house. Then we could have a little dance all our own!'

" 'Yes, yes, why not?' exclaimed her husband. 'You have had a wonderful idea, Céleste!' After all, to the friends whom they had invited it would seem a feather in his cap, and in that of his wife. They may not have been invited to the palace, but this was certainly the next best thing. And from one angle, even a little better—it would be getting the orchestra first. When it was freshest! Surely that was something!

"The convict bowed at the *Surveillant's* suggestion that the musicians come to his house first, and replied: 'We can refuse you nothing, sir. I shall go to bring my colleagues.'

"In a few minutes he returned with the rest of the orchestra. There were six of them, including two famous criminals, Chuffe and Adriet. The convicts warmed up in a short time, and soon were playing some very lively music indeed. It was said later, by those who were so fortunate as to have been present at the party, that the convicts played with a gaiety and abandon one would scarcely expect to find in men situated as they were. During rehearsals, there had been eight in the orchestra; but these six played with such *élan* they made up for the fact that two of their number hadn't shown up.

"Several times during the next hour or so, the musicians asked the *Surveillant* if they might not leave, to go over to the palace and set up their music racks, but the *Surveillant*, realizing how wonderfully successful this impromptu affair was turning out, could not resist prolonging it to the last possible moment. At half-past eight he reluctantly informed his enchanted guests that the next number

must be the last dance. It was then that the convicts really outdid themselves. The orchestra leader announced that the finale would be a polka, the very popular composition entitled, '*Au revoir et merci*'—'Good-by, and thank you!'

"Wildly applauded, they played it through twice. And then, fiddling away for the third time, the orchestra marched out of the house, without missing a note as they went. Through the prison gates they paraded, still playing, while the guards and turnkeys cheered, for didn't all Cayenne know that the Governor was giving a ball that night?

"Somewhere along the street, they were joined by the two remaining members of their Musicians' Local, two men who had thoughtfully lingered at the telephone building in order to cut the wires between the Governor's palace and the prison. These two fell into step with their six comrades and they all marched on, cheered by the populace along the street. The phantom orchestra moved through the night, but now their brilliant music died down to a mere humming of the tune, '*Au revoir et merci*,' as they drew nearer to the palace. And when they reached it, they did not stop. They went right on past the Governor's mansion, still murmuring their theme song, 'Good-by, and thank you!' and on to the Crique Fouillée, the canal which leads to the sea, just outside the city. Here they stepped gaily into a boat which was awaiting them, fully provisioned, and before daylight came they were well out of sight and sailing northward on the broad Atlantic.

"Back at the warden's house, in the prison yard, the *Surveillant's* guests were continuing their dancing, to the tune of phonograph records, a not too successful substitute for the inspired musicians they had had; and up at the palace all the guests were assembled, impatiently waiting for the music to strike up. At nine-fifteen, the Governor's aide arrived at the prison gates and de-

manded to be shown instantly into the presence of the *Surveillant*.

"Where are the musicians?" he demanded. "And what in the name of the sainted Thomas A. Edison has happened to the telephone wires?"

"M'sieu le *Surveillant* had no coherent answer to make. But his face grew very red, as the painful truth flashed across his mind. And up to the day of his departure from Cayenne—which, you may be sure, was not long thereafter—he always flew into a rage whenever anyone, no matter how innocently, bade him 'good-by, and thank you.'"

We all laughed. "What happened to the runaway orchestra?" I asked.

"Oh, it reached Venezuela safely and enjoyed an enormous success," said Echard. "After all, it was composed of some very fine musicians, indeed. The fact that they were cutthroats of one sort or another didn't interfere with their being good fiddlers in the least. And they had been rehearsing for weeks, you remember. The Venezuelans booked them as the sensation of Europe, direct from Paris."

"And are they still in Venezuela?"

"Oh, no," the *chef-du-poste* replied. "Their success went to their heads. Too much money led them straight back to their old betrayers, wine, women and song. In a very few months they were in trouble with the police; and within the year they were all safely back here in Guiana."

"Well, Governor Chot," I asked, "if they're still here, why don't *you* give a ball?"

He smiled, but seemed to be studying the end of his cigar. "No, I think I shall wait until the war is over, and I have returned to Paris," he replied. "For the moment, I prefer my wireless."

He and Monsieur Echard glanced at each other. Simultane-

ously they began whistling the tune of "*Au revoir et merci.*" And then they laughed again.

That evening, dining with the Governor and listening to his radio, word came over the air that Senator Pepper urged the United States to seize Dakar, in French Africa, and some of France's possessions in the western hemisphere as well. I saw a shadow pass over the Governor's face. He glanced at me.

"If that should happen, Mr. Smith," he said quietly, "while you are here, you realize of course that you would immediately become my prisoner, even though you are my guest."

I hoped that I detected the glint of a smile in his eyes as he spoke. But I wasn't sure, and I didn't enjoy the rest of my dinner. In fact, Senator Pepper had given me indigestion.

Perhaps an hour later there came a knock at the door of the drawing room, and a servant apologetically entered. He brought a telegram to the Governor, who, murmuring excuses, opened it. He frowned as he read it.

"I have just received word that the order permitting the construction of the Pan-American air base in this colony has been countermanded," he announced, glancing up.

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# 12

## I LOSE AT POKER

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I HAD been in Cayenne for nearly a week before I made my first visit to the Zoological Gardens, which, I found, contained exactly two things of interest: *la mouton paresseuse*, the sloth of which I had been told on my first night in Cayenne; and Roman, the taxidermist murderer, who was a *libéré* employed at the Zoo. Mr. Sloth was asleep in a small tree. Upside down, hanging by all fours, he, of all the inhabitants of Cayenne, had found the real solution of the problem of keeping cool in this steam-bath climate. In my later trips to the gardens—with one exception, when I took his picture—I could have sworn that he had never moved an inch, and this eternal immobility at length diminished my interest in him.

On the contrary, I found Roman increasingly interesting and my visits were frequent. His duties were not onerous, as the collection of creatures under his supervision consisted of the sloth, a few monkeys and three large boa constrictors. These last may be called Roman's room-mates, for they lived in big glass cases separated from his bed only by a thin partition.

It was not the Zoo, therefore, that brought me day after day to the gardens. The citizens of Cayenne do not go to the Zoo. It is a gathering place principally for *libérés*; hence Roman is a clearing-house for news and gossip. Reward for good behavior promotes the convict to the rank of trusty. Rising at five o'clock in the morning, he goes on parade at six and is then assigned by the guards to

his job for the day. Three hours at his task and then the day is his own. In nine cases out of ten his employment is merely one way of helping pass the time. He may clean the streets, pick up papers in the Savane, the great square in the center of the city, or he may be detailed to cut the grass of some official's garden, or care for the flowers. Generally by ten o'clock, or by eleven at the latest, he is free to do as he pleases. He is expected to be in his cell by six o'clock at night. Frequently, however, he stays out until eight; and if it is Sunday night, and there is a moving picture advertised, he goes to the theater.

Roman himself had an inexhaustible supply of convict lore, and his stories lured me as compellingly as those of Scheherazade's thousand and one nights. Should he pause for breath or to search his memory for another tale, the interval was always filled by some other convict who had dropped in to loaf with him. Roman dwelt in a tiny room in the Snake House. It was very simply furnished with a cot and two chairs, but he pointed with great pride to his chief source of comfort and diversion, a phonograph. I had introduced myself as a visitor to Guiana. Roman accepted me at my face value. After all, he, as well as every prisoner in the city, knew of our arrival. With a frontier closed to travelers, a visitor from the outside world was a personage of some note.

I talked with many of Roman's friends and discussed at length the convict system and some of the problems of the men. I had heard the official version and I was eager to know the prisoners' side of the story.

"Sex and climate are the two main problems," said Roman. "The food furnished by the Government is not bad; in fact, up until a few weeks ago, when the amount was cut, it was quite adequate."

"I have been told by Government officials," I replied, "that the

allotment for each man is six hundred grams of rice, two hundred of meat and five hundred of vegetables daily."

"That is just about right," Roman agreed. Then he continued, "No, it's not the food that makes an enforced visit to Guiana a nightmare, it's the heat and the humidity. The Government does not take into account that penal servitude in such a climate is a vastly different thing from convict labor in a temperate zone. It is either ignorant of the needs of the situation or deliberately indifferent to them. The climate is the real horror. It takes all the force out of a man and reduces him to pulp. Were it not for the depressing humidity, there are many convicts who could not only adapt themselves more readily to conditions, but who would even be quite happy. Guiana rots you; and the hospital cannot cope with all the diseases. The doctors are for the most part good men, capable and kindly and willing to help, but their job is too heavy. It runs away from them."

"You mentioned sex," I reminded him. And then added, before he had a chance to reply, "It is generally asserted and believed that there is an almost complete lack of morality among the prisoners, and that the most revolting evidence of this is seduction of young men upon their arrival, by the old timers."

"Not at all," he asserted vigorously. "There is no reason for its existence; and where cause does not exist such abuses will seldom be found.

"Take me, for example. I was given a ten-year sentence and expected to be here for life, as any sentence over seven years was automatically doubled into life. Now, with the *doublage* system being discontinued, I can return to France as soon as I have the money for the trip and a boat comes along to take me. But during those long years here there was a good deal of time each day when there was no direct surveillance over me. Surely if I had

wished to meet a woman clandestinely and had had the price to pay, such a meeting could have been arranged. There are women of all types and races in the colony. Not white women, of course, but every other color in the world is represented and plenty of them have some European blood."

"Well, you don't make the sex life of the convicts sound like such a problem," I said. "What is so difficult about it?"

"The type of woman we can meet," he replied. "They are nearly all diseased in one form or another, and most of them are of the lowest types. Besides their mixed bloods, nearly all of them are old women by the time they are twenty. No, the colony has its share of degenerates, as has every city, town or prison in the world, but the very nature of the confinement that makes masculine degeneracy rampant in your penal institutions scarcely exists here. *That* trouble is the least of the worries in Guiana!"

Roman's own story, as he related it to me, had more human interest than many of the others I had heard, and he himself had a stronger personality. An educated man with a good background, he imparted to his narrative a vividness and a restraint that made it the more impressive.

"I was born in the south of France," he began as we sat in his little room one day. "All my life I lived there with my family, until fourteen years ago." He paused as though thinking back. "My father, who was a taxidermist, had one of the finest taxidermy establishments in France. I was scarcely twenty when I became enamored of a young girl who lived only a short distance from my home. She was quite the belle of the town, and I fell madly in love with her, and as both our families approved the match, in due course we became engaged. The wedding was to be a gala one and many were the preparations and plans. A fortnight before the great day the first gifts arrived, and after that they came

in a steady stream. I was so proud of my beautiful fiancée and felt that everyone must be envious of my good fortune!"

Roman stopped speaking and his eyes assumed a faraway look. He wiped his pale thin forehead with a rag which served him as a handkerchief. There were beads of perspiration there, but I did not know whether or not it was the heat that was responsible for this sudden dampness.

"I must tell you," he continued, "that the love was greater on my side than on hers. She had told me from the beginning that she was very fond of me, but it ended there; so I was aware that she did not love me with the passion and fervor I felt for her. I was completely infatuated, and did not expect her to be wholly frank, for, of course, it is not customary for a young lady to show her real affection before marriage. It was, you know, to a certain extent, an *arrangement de famille*, as it would have to be to conform with our French standard of convention and good taste. However, we were consulted in all the plans, and in fact the arrangement was made as a result of my insistence. *Alors*, three days before the ceremony I went to her home to give her my wedding gift. It was then that she told me."

Roman paused again for a few moments, a look of intense agony passed over his face. The man was either profoundly moved as he remembered the tragedy he was recounting or a splendid actor and a consummate liar.

"On the day that I took her my gift," he continued, "she seemed terribly nervous. We met in the conservatory at the end of the garden. I kissed her as was my custom, and eagerly put the little jewel box into her hand, so that she might open it herself. She did not respond to my kisses, and I felt that she was trembling. She took the box but did not open it; instead, she thrust it into the pocket of my jacket.

" 'No, no, no!' she sobbed. 'I do not want it! I do not want presents from you, now, or ever. I cannot go on with it! I do not love you. I am promised to another. I will marry him, not you!'

"Then, as she rushed into the garden, she called out the man's name—her lover's name. I was stunned. The shock was appalling on the very eve of our marriage! I staggered home in a daze. For hours I sat in my room, like one in a trance.

"Finally I roused myself enough to prepare for dinner. I began to shave, automatically. Like a man moving in a dream, I set out my shaving apparatus and, looking into the mirror, began to daub my face with lather.

"Some horrible thing had happened to the mirror. Perhaps I might have been able to force myself to forget her if it had not been for that accursed mirror. Mine was not the only face reflected in it. I could see hers, also, just as if she were standing at my side. Her eyes were mocking. And it did no good to glance to one side. Wherever I looked, in that mirror, I saw her eyes—laughing eyes, mocking at me. Nor was that all—behind her, also reflected in the mirror, were still other eyes, a man's eyes. Her lover's!

"Well, what could I do? It was impossible to stand there any longer, to endure the fixed gaze of those merciless eyes. I rushed from the room. I rushed out of the house. I commenced to run down the street. I swear to you that I was wholly unconscious of the fact that my razor was still clutched in my hand.

"I burst in the door of her house and ran straight toward the conservatory. She was still there. She must have been waiting for her lover. I realized that when I saw the expression in her eyes. The mirror hadn't lied. Her eyes were mocking. I couldn't face them. It was then that I saw the razor in my hand. I struck at her. It made just one great gash, from ear to ear. The blood spurted out and she fell over. She could not have suffered much.

Just one gasping cry, and it was all over. No one had heard us, and I walked home quieted. But someone must have seen me, for the police came and arrested me even before I had finished shaving. I could have finished, too, without any trouble, for her eyes didn't stare at me out of the glass any more.

"The wedding presents were all sent back. There was one, a taxidermy set, I wish I had kept. The instruments I have here are not at all adequate."

"How long ago was that, Roman?" I asked curiously.

"About fourteen years, I think," he said. "One loses track of time. But of the fourteen hundred prisoners who sailed with me on the prison ship *La Martinière*, only five of us are left."

"What became of the rest of them?"

"Oh, a few have returned to France, some of them have escaped to Brazil or to the north, a good many have been killed by the Djukas, the piranha or the sharks, and the largest number died right here. The usual thing."

"As you see, I am still a taxidermist. I take care of the animals and the three snakes. From time to time I go off into the jungle and if I am lucky I bag some rare bird and bring it home and mount it."

"Is that some of your work there?" I asked, pointing to a small red flamingo with an enormous beak, proudly perched on a stand of purpleheart wood.

"Yes," he replied, glancing at it despondently. "I wish I could sell my handiwork as easily as that convict sculptor sells his carvings of panthers. But I never was much good at carving."

I thought of his work with the razor, but forebore to praise.

On another of my visits, I found Roman talking to one of his friends, another *libéré*. Like many of the convicts of this sort, the man had married a black wife. He had apparently given up all

hope of ever returning to France. I judged that he had a hard enough time earning even a few daily scraps of food for himself and his family.

This man had brought with him his two little daughters, pickaninnies as black as their mother. They entertained themselves by pressing their noses against the glass of the snake cage. Convinced that they would remain there, out of harm's way, their father went on talking with Roman and, when I came up, courteously included me in the conversation. He was talking of his family affairs. I soon gathered that he was expecting the arrival of a third child in the immediate future. Plans for the christening ceremony were already under way. He politely invited me, as a friend of Roman's, to join them.

He was a slight little fellow, low voiced and mild mannered and, except when he was talking about the christening, he seemed too listless to harm a fly. Only when he spoke of the party did his eyes brighten. The affair was obviously an event calculated to enliven the monotony of an existence which must drag on and on indefinitely. It was plain that he had dully accepted his duty as a family man and would go on fulfilling his obligations to wife and children to the very end of the dreary vista. I was sure that nothing but gentle resignation remained in his soul and I was stirred to pity by his drab cloak of meekness. He talked pleasantly on in his low gentle voice.

Suddenly the quiet of the gardens was broken by a shrill scream from one of the little black girls. We jumped out of our boots.

As we ran toward the child and her little sister, my first thought was that one of the boa constrictors had in some way managed to escape from its cage, and had attacked the children. But not so. As we reached the cage we discovered that the child, in order to get a better view of the snakes, had piled up some pieces of wood

to stand on. These had slipped, and in trying to keep her balance she had stepped with her bare foot on a rusty nail protruding from one of the boards. She was shrieking in pain and fright.

The mild-mannered little *libéré* rushed up to her. But instead of trying to soothe her or doing anything to stop her pain, he seized her roughly, picked up a small stick, and began to beat the sole of her foot, not caring whether the blows fell on the wound or not. His face was white with senseless rage. Naturally the child screamed still more loudly, until Roman, discovering the nature of the accident, ran to his room, came back with some iodine and bandaged the still bleeding foot. The father's fury subsided as quickly as it had risen. Again he lapsed into his air of gentle listlessness. Dr. Jekyll had changed into demoniac Mr. Hyde, and back again into meek and inoffensive Jekyll before my very eyes.

Soon the youngster was unconcernedly playing again in the dirt in front of the monkey cage, her small black face still smeared with tears, and her father rejoined Roman and me under the palm trees. But I had been horrified at what seemed to me an act of heartless brutality, and my ruffled nerves were little soothed by Roman's apology for his friend's act, his generous explanation being that the man had whipped her only in order to discipline her to be more careful in the future. I was uncomfortable throughout the remainder of our conversation and was relieved when the father finally gathered up his two children and departed.

After he had gone, Roman confided to me the story of the crime which had brought this meek little fellow to the penal colony. In France, he had merely cut a woman to pieces and then buried the various parts of her anatomy in different sections of the country. A gentle soul!

One afternoon Roman invited me to the Zoological Gardens  
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for a poker game. In addition to himself, four other murderers were to take a hand. I was to make the sixth player.

The murderers were all trusties, which meant that they earned three cents a day. Half of this sum is taken by the Government to pay for the trial which the convict so inconsiderately forced upon his devoted country; thus the trusty is left with an earned income of ten cents a week. With this in his pocket, he is free to indulge in any form of riotous living that strikes his fancy. His choice is poker. Poker offers entertainment for the idle moment and optimistic anticipations for the future as well. At poker, the player can forget realities—until the moment of reckoning. And even then, like gamblers the world over, the loser can shrug his shoulders and shuffle off to whatever shelter he may claim for the night, there to dream of the fortune the deal will certainly bring him another day.

Roman had briefly sketched to me, when he extended his invitation, the records of the four gentlemen whom he was also inviting to sit in. One of them, like himself, had murdered a sweetheart. Another had done away with his own wife. The third man didn't rate so high in the social scale, because his victim had been merely an Arab in Africa, where, it appeared, murderers of Arabs come a dime a dozen. Moreover, the one he had lopped off had been an overseer in the African jungle timber camp where he had been working, and as overseers are not very popular with the convicts, their liquidation hardly comes under the head of artistic crime. It seems to belong in the class of less spectacular, more humdrum duties, such as squashing a centipede. But the fourth man, it was easy to see, was looked up to with admiration by all his fellow convicts in Cayenne. He was at the very top rung of their social ladder. He had murdered his mother-in-law.

However, when I got there, although the game hadn't even begun, this fellow was taking his leave, in spite of flattering urg-

ings to stay on. He was sorry, but he just couldn't; he had been invited to a similar party, earlier, and he couldn't get out of it. Being in such demand, it was really very decent of him to drop in on us even for a moment.

I wondered who was to take his place at our game. But as we settled in our seats, Roman motioned to an individual who had been unobtrusively lurking in the background with a hangdog air and impatiently beckoned the fellow to come over and take the vacant chair.

"I won't even introduce him to you," whispered Roman to me, as the poor chap slunk diffidently forward. "I have to apologize, but it was difficult, at the last moment, to find anyone to take our friend's place on such short notice. This fellow never murdered anybody. He really doesn't belong in our set. Why, the only reason he was sent over here to Cayenne was for a cheap burglary."

I glanced around the table at my fellow players with some degree of interest. They all smiled at me encouragingly, but they didn't even deign to speak to the burglar. He sat there, humbly gazing at his lap.

"My friends," began Roman with poorly concealed excitement, "I propose that in honor of our distinguished guest from San Francisco we increase the limit. Our customary limit can scarcely interest him, I am sure. I propose that we raise it to one franc!"

Tremendous sensation! One franc was worth approximately two and one-half cents! Every man there drew in his breath with a sharp gasp. Of a verity, this was going to be a murderous game indeed! But they were true-blue sports, every one of them. They all nodded, without a moment's hesitation. In fact, they broke into enthusiastic applause. Inwardly, I wondered just how many of my own friends at home would agree to let one single chip rep-

resent two whole days' income. I looked at them with respect, if not awe.

As the cards were being dealt by Roman for the first hand, I ventured to ask the gentleman at my left if he would mind telling me just how he had happened to come to Cayenne.

"Not at all," he replied with a chuckle. "I bumped my old lady off, and they caught me at it. I didn't mind, so long as they didn't make me marry Madame Guillotine. My wife had been nagging me for years, ever since I married her. For the life of me, I can't see why I didn't finish her off long before I did."

He was from the south of France, and he had a hearty laugh.

From the very first hand, it was easy to see that all five of my companions were getting more excitement out of the game than John W. Gates ever got at Monte Carlo playing at maximums. And no wonder, with that one-franc limit, which to them was practically the sky itself. They played them tight to the chest. And when the biggest pot of the afternoon, amounting to twenty-two francs—a cool fifty-five cents in American money—went to our friend from the south of France he was heartily congratulated. He was easily the best poker player in the sextet. His facial expression never changed. Perhaps he had acquired that proficiency in maintaining a dead pan during the long years when his now unlamented wife kept on nagging him, never guessing as she did so what was going on underneath.

Our host also had his big moment in the game, when his deuce in the hole for three of a kind at stud proved to be the case deuce, and therefore better than my two pairs, kings over jacks. We played until five o'clock, when, I am glad to say, I found myself the biggest loser, to the amount of something over two dollars. It was worth it.

There had been one moment, it is true, when I was on the verge

of retrieving my previous losses. But Roman thought faster than I, and my actions were beyond my control. It was a draw hand, with some spirited betting, and I knew I had a cinch. Roman thought that he was sitting pretty, but just at the crowning moment when I was about to spread out my cards triumphantly, my smirk must have betrayed me, for Roman instantly realized he was beaten. He gave a whistle that the largest of the three boa constrictors in the cage behind him recognized as a signal call, and followed this up by calling its name, "Annette," over his shoulder. The reptile slithered right out of its box, the top of which had been left off, perhaps for just such an emergency, and started to wriggle straight toward me. Undoubtedly I should have ignored Annette, but, I ask you, what would *you* have done? I jumped, and dropped several cards. As quick as lightning, Roman said with a bland smile, "Pass pot."

And it *was* a pass pot—the confounded murderers wouldn't let me play my hand, and my one opportunity to recoup my lost funds had vanished. The convicts were too good for me, in more ways than one.

But it was an afternoon well spent and thoroughly enjoyed. All my companions were courteous, agreeable and sportsmanlike. If the three who, like myself, were losers did look a little as though they might be committing suicide within the hour, they were still gracious enough to congratulate the two winners, Roman and the Southerner who disliked nagging. And these two more fortunate ones displayed no unpleasant smugness over their superior skill. Instead, they shook hands with each of us in turn, bowing as they did so, and murmured encouragingly:

"Better luck next time!"

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# 13

## THE WITCH DOCTOR

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FROM my pleasant seat at a table in the shade, there on the *terrasse* of the Hôtel des Palmistes, I idly watched the people taking their ease in the sunlight-dappled square across the street. Most of them had chosen benches in the shadows. But there was one woman, a slender and very handsome light-colored mulatto, who seemed to love the sun like a cat. Indeed, her sleepy grace, her air of complete contentment, her sleekness, even her yawn as she stretched her arms lazily, all reminded me of a cat sunning itself. I had no doubt that, if someone should place a bowl of milk on the sun-warmed grass beside her, she would lap it immediately.

As I watched her, smiling inwardly at my fancy, a diffident little man shyly approached her. They were too far away for me to hear what he said, but there was no doubt whatever that she was annoyed by his temerity. She sat up and seemed to grow suddenly bigger, like a cat that swells up. She opened her mouth and, I give you my word, she hissed at him. He went away like a shot. The speed with which he escaped that angry feline was ludicrous.

I forgot about her, then, because my waiter ushered to my table a visitor whom I was expecting. It was my new acquaintance, Monsieur du Serre Felmon, the Witch Doctor of Cayenne. I jumped up, shook hands, and he took the seat beside me. I went straight to the question that I had wanted to ask him ever since I had first heard of him.

"Is it really true," I demanded, "that you can cure the victim of a deadly snake bite?"

"Yes, it is true, I can," he replied gravely. "But it is scarcely correct to call such a bite deadly, since I always cure it."

I gazed at him with some little awe. It was difficult to believe that such an insignificant man, with graying hair at the temples, so simply, almost shabbily dressed, could be possessed of a healing power great enough to be respected even by the French surgeons at the Colonial Hospital. The only physician in the whole colony of French Guiana, whether M. D. or W. D., Doctor of Medicine or Doctor of Witchcraft, who had no fear of poisonous snakes! I hastily beckoned to the waiter to bring the doctor whatever he wanted to drink.

"Yes," the birdlike little fellow went on, visibly preening his feathers as he sipped his rum, "it is quite a distinction. It is said of me that I am the only man in the world who can walk freely in the snake-haunted jungles. The snakes, the very vipers that the whole world fears, the *graje* itself, all come to me obediently when I call them. That is, nearly always."

"What happens if they *don't* come to you?" I inquired.

"Oh, then I go to them," he replied airily, "so that they bite me and die. That is their punishment for not obeying as promptly as they should."

I decided I had better have another rum myself. I took a sturdy gulp and then managed to ask:

"How did you acquire this amazing power, Doctor?"

"Ah, that is so simple to answer," he replied. "I once rendered a slight service to the Roucouyenne Indians on the upper Maroni. They rewarded me by teaching me this secret."

"But you cure people right here in Cayenne if they are bitten?" I persisted.

"Yes indeed," he answered. "The staff doctors at the hospital always send me their snake-bite cases, and, as I say, I never fail to cure them."

"May I ask how?" said I. "Or is that a secret?"

"Oh, no, it is no secret," he shrugged. "It is very simple. When I was living with the Roucouyenne Indians they showed me a plant in the jungle whose leaf they called *Feuille de Graje*, the Leaf of the Viper. The cure is effected through the use of three of these leaves the first day, six the second day and nine the third day. Upon being bitten, you take your three leaves and pound them in a cup or a calabash of coconut until you have collected their juice, then you add to this some alcohol or white tafia. About a jigger and a half, either of the alcohol or of the white rum. This, mixed with the juice of the leaves, is what you drink."

"But hold on a minute," I protested. "Those preparations and poundings take time and effort. What's the poison doing all the while? And I've always heard that you're not supposed to exert yourself after being bitten. Can't this stuff be made up in advance?"

"No, the entire concoction must be freshly prepared, or it is not effective. Besides, there are other steps. We have not yet finished. The residue that remains in the bottom of the cup is then poured out upon a strip of cotton, torn from a shirt perhaps, or upon a bit of gauze, if that is available. Another piece is placed on top of the first. The victim must then immediately take a knife whose blade he has sterilized in a fire, and open up the wound caused by the snake's fangs. On this he puts the concoction in the bandage, which is then kept moist by repeated wetting with alcohol or rum. This must be done all the way back to camp."

"What do you do if you are out in the bush without any alcohol or tafia?" I asked. "You make it sound as if these things could be had without any trouble at all. What if you are caught short?"

"Then," he said impressively, "you take the three leaves and chew them steadily, mixing the juice from the leaves with your own saliva, until you can obtain the white rum."

"But what if there isn't any in camp?" I persisted.

"No one but a fool would be out in the bush without alcohol in one form or another," my precise little guest asserted, in the manner of one stating an incontrovertible fact.

"Well, then, these leaves," I kept on. "Are they so common that they can be found on every bush?"

"In the deep jungle they are almost everywhere," he explained. "But along the coast they are exceedingly rare. That's the entire trouble. That is why there are so many victims, those who are unable to get to me in time. You see, one would have to know just where to look, and to know exactly what sort of leaf to look for. One must be very familiar with their design. There are so many leaves in the bush, of somewhat the same shape and color, that only the well-trained eye, such as mine, can detect the difference. That, m'sieu, is why the French doctors at the hospital send all their victims to me, and why most of them never go on hunting trips except on the outskirts of Cayenne."

"They can't get anything except small game near the city, can they?" I asked.

"On the contrary. In eight days of hunting with a party of my friends last month, we caught nine jaguars—tigers, we call them here—all near town. In fact, we found one of the jaguars lurking near the Zoological Gardens, virtually within the city limits. That of course was unusual. One might go a month or more without any such luck."

"Do you use dogs to hunt them with?" I asked, and, when he had nodded in the affirmative, "Aren't you afraid the jaguars will kill them?"

"No, not at all," he replied. "I always wash them first."

"Wash them!" I exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

"Well, m'sieu," he smiled, rising, "if you have enjoyed a suf-

ficiency of liquid for the moment, perhaps you would like to come with me. I am going to wash one this afternoon."

"I wouldn't miss it for a million dollars," I assured him fervently. "Lead on!"

As we entered the modest home of Monsieur du Serre Felmon, I naturally looked around in expectation of seeing a dog or two, at the least. But there wasn't one. The only animal in sight was a large black tomcat, curled up luxuriously in a sunny spot on the floor of the front room. Du Serre Felmon addressed him as Diablotin and the cat blinked at us from its large yellow eyes, but did not choose to move.

"The dog is outdoors; he does not dare to enter while Diablotin is here," my host explained, noting my questioning look. "Do not despair, we shall have the washing right away. *Jacques!*"

He fairly bellowed this last word, with a lung power that I never would have guessed in so small a man. Immediately it was answered by a whine at the back door. Du Serre Felmon opened the door, and in crept an apologetic hound, of sadly questionable parentage. The poor beast must have guessed what was in store for him, for he crawled forward with his belly close to the floor, in the manner of dogs the world over when about to face the tortures of the bath.

We escorted him into a small side room, in which stood a large tub. My host picked up several tin containers that had once held Standard Oil and began pouring their contents into the tub.

"Here in French Guiana," he explained, as he went on emptying the mysterious liquid into the receptacle, "the Indians of the deep jungle have always immunized their dogs against jaguars. This preparation I'm putting into Jacques' tub is a composite of the juices of many jungle roots and herbs and it takes several days to assemble. I finished this batch only last evening. The Indians

have known the formula for centuries, and it has been a closely guarded secret."

"You must have rendered them a wonderful service indeed, to have been entrusted with the secret!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, this recipe for dog washing has nothing to do with that other formula," he replied. "I unearthed this one when I was a boy."

The learned doctor apparently had more secrets up his sleeve than a dog has fleas, and his howling hound evidently had plenty of those. His agonized yaps and yelps as he was lowered by his master into the tubful of messy-looking liquid were unceasing. The scrubbing, which the doctor administered with his bare hands, lasted about five minutes. The thing that especially interested me was that although there was no soap anywhere in sight a good lather quickly appeared on the coat of the melancholy Jacques, indicating there must be some sort of a soap base in the roots used. The job finished, my host plucked the now thoroughly drenched and subdued pup from his bath and began rubbing him vigorously with an old Turkish towel. Next he took a sharp knife, and lifting each of the dog's four feet in turn, made a scratch on each of the pads. While I watched, fascinated, he rubbed some of the mysterious liquid into the incisions. The dog's howls now reached tops in crescendo, but Du Serre Felmon assured me that the stuff didn't sting in the least, and that Jacques was merely voicing his disapproval more from fright than pain. Finally, to complete my amazement, he opened the jaws of the poor bedraggled pup and forced some of the liquid down his throat, holding the jaws closed until he had unwillingly swallowed it.

"Is it necessary to give the poor beast all this treatment?" I finally protested, unable to contain myself any longer. "Personally, I think I'd prefer snake bite."

"This isn't for snakes, this is what you might call anti-tiger

vaccination," said the little Cayennais calmly, as he put the dog down and began to wipe his hands. "It has a rather strange by-product, though, in most cases—after one of these washings very few dogs ever take any interest in mating. But if, in an exceptional case, a washed dog does produce puppies, the pups inherit the immunization, in its full strength."

Before this remarkable scientific fact had had time to sink fully into my reeling brain, we heard a knock at the outer door and the sound of voices.

"Oh, excuse me," said my host. "I know who that is—some friends of mine who borrowed one of my dogs for a hunting trip. I'll just go and get him."

As he hurried out of the bath shed, I watched the now thoroughly dejected hound slink over to a corner and collapse on the Turkish towel. There it began in a half-hearted way to lick the cuts on its four paws, going from one to another in unfailing rotation, "One! Two! Three! Four!" But it soon tired of this, dropped its head, and went soundly off to sleep. I returned to the main room and closed the door gently behind me, to let the poor thing rest.

I was just in time to see Monsieur du Serre Felmon re-entering the house from the front door, accompanied by another dog. This one, as uncertain in breed as the first, was as lively as a cricket, jumping and wriggling about his master in an eager effort to be petted. He was desperately trying to lick his master's hand and accompanied these leaps with ecstatic little sounds from the depths of his throat. It comforted me somewhat to observe that at least one of the dogs was so fond of the Doctor, for it indicated that he treated them well, when he wasn't demonstrating his prowess as a Swedish masseur of dogs.

"This is a good hound, indeed!" exclaimed Du Serre Felmon proudly, stooping to pat the animal's head. "He had never been

on a hunting trip into the bush, and I washed him for the first time just before they started!"

"Was the hunt successful?" I asked. "Did the washing bring any luck?"

"But yes, m'sieu!" exclaimed the little Witch Doctor, beaming. "He treed two tigers for them!"

At that moment a rotund black woman, evidently the cook, entered the room from still another door, which led from the kitchen. She was carrying a plate heaped with scraps of meat. The black cat, Diablotin, roused himself from his nap instantly. As the woman placed the dish on the floor for him, he rose, stretched himself luxuriously—with exactly the grace of the mulatto I had seen in the Square that afternoon—and walked leisurely and daintily across the room toward his dinner.

In the same instant the hunting dog sniffed the meat. He bounded toward it. The two animals almost collided. An expression of utter amazement and incredulity spread over that cat's face. It was perfectly plain that he had always been undisputed overlord of that house in the past, and that no puppy had ever dreamed of coming between him and his dinner before. And the hound, also, suddenly seemed to remember past experience, and backed hastily away from the immediate area of dangerous cat claws. He cocked his head on one side and looked down at the cat with some hesitancy.

"Tut, tut!" said his master gently. "Have you forgotten your washing?"

I shall always remember the scene that followed. At the whisper from his master, the dog seemed to draw a deep breath. Certainly he stepped forward. Quick as lightning the cat's paw went up into the air, claws outspread, giving fair warning that it would strike if the pup advanced one inch.

Then came the miracle, the incredible thing, utterly amazing

to me and undoubtedly even more amazing to the cat—the cat's paw remained high in mid-air, and evidently there was nothing he could do about it!

The dog must have sensed this, for he drew closer with extreme caution, one slow step at a time. And still the cat remained motionless, though its upraised paw began to droop little by little, and the claws to go back into their sheath. Finally the dog nosed in toward the plate, right under Diablotin's quivering whiskers; and when still nothing happened, he gulped the meat, decidedly pleased with himself for his new super-normal powers. He didn't understand them any more than I did, but he didn't care. They worked.

The cat crept back into a corner. I felt terribly sorry for it. I hope that never, so long as I live, will I feel as humiliated as that cat must have felt.

"Do you mean to tell me," I said, when I could find my voice, "that this washing business works as well on house cats as on jaguars?"

"You saw for yourself, didn't you?" retorted the little Witch Doctor. "And now, if you will excuse me, I must keep an engagement in another part of town. But it is true—the washing apparently has its effect on any member of the cat family, big or small."

I went back to my hotel with my head in a daze. There was something spooky about the whole business that almost gave me the creeps. If there was any rational explanation for the way in which that dog had intimidated the cat, it was, I suppose, in some odor or whatever, emanating from the root juices in which the dog had been washed. But it was too deep for me. All I wanted to do was to tell somebody about it.

The first person I saw as I entered the bar of the *Hôtel des Palmistes* was a Cayennais, a very nice chap, whom I had met casually around the hotel. I went straight up to him. A little

farther along the bar stood another man, with his nose in a drink.

"I say," I exclaimed, "do you happened to know a fellow here in this town, a fellow who says he can cure people who've been bitten by vipers, a doctor named Du Serre Felmon?"

The drunk farther along the bar pricked up his ears. "He's no doctor, he's a fakir, that's what he is!" he volunteered belligerently.

"Never mind him," whispered my acquaintance, grinning. "He's a little prejudiced, I'm afraid. Come over here and sit down, and I'll tell you about the Doctor."

We sat down. "I suppose he told you that the Roucouyenne Indians gave him the secret, in return for something he did for them?" he began. I nodded. "Well, I think I can tell you how that came about. I'm a dentist, you see, and I've made two trips into the Roucouyenne country, the first one before he ever went there. In fact, it was I who gave him the tip that started him off on the whole thing."

"Wait a minute," I interrupted. "What were you doing 'way up there?"

He laughed. "I know what you're thinking," he said. "You're wondering what business a dentist would find, away off in the jungle. Well, my best-paying patients are neither free white men nor convicts. They are blacks who have gone into the deep jungle to prospect for gold and do placer mining. Even when their teeth are in perfect condition, they frequently like to have them taken out and replaced by gold ones. Solid gold, made from what they have mined themselves. They think it's just like having money in a bank you take with you wherever you go."

"And do the Roucouyenne Indians want gold teeth, too?" I asked.

"No, but they have the gold, and plenty of it, believe me. I went into their territory because I thought I might be able to do a

little trading with them. Now it so happened that the district I visited was the one that Du Serre Felmon was to enter, later. It was under the absolute control of a very powerful medicine man, a veritable dictator. Not one of the Indians would trade with me until he gave the permission. Nor did I ever so much as see him. I was put off, on one pretext or another, until finally in a round-about fashion I heard that the medicine man had hidden himself away in one of his periodic spells of retirement. I kept on asking questions and found out that he went into retirement because he suffered frightful bodily pain. Not constantly, you understand, but in recurrent seizures. So whenever one of these spells came on, he would quickly proclaim, with due ceremony, of course, that he wasn't to be disturbed until further notice. He didn't want word to get around that he was a sick man, you see, for after all, wasn't he a medicine man and a healer? It would ruin his prestige."

"What was the matter with him, a toothache?" I asked.

"No, it wasn't his teeth, I'm sorry to say." The dentist smiled. "I might have done something, if that had been the trouble. No, it was a different part of his anatomy, and Du Serre Felmon was the man who was clever enough to diagnose it."

"Was he there at the time?"

"No, I met him as I was going back and he was coming in. He was placer mining, and he wasn't having much luck. When I told him about all the gold the Roucouyennes had, and which I hadn't got, he perked right up. I told him what I had heard about the chief's recurrent illnesses, too. And the next thing I knew he was on his way to the Roucouyenne country. That was the time when they gave him the secret of their snake medicine and made him God-of-the-Snakes."

"But why should they do that?" I persisted.

"I didn't ever get the whole story," said my friend the dentist, "but this is what I gathered. He had with him, when he went up

there, a satchelful of morphine and a hypodermic needle. Don't ask me how he happened to be carting the stuff around with him. Anyway, when he arrived there, he just settled down to wait till the big medicine man had his next attack. In the meantime he made himself as friendly as possible, and when the old boy was stricken again, our little friend had no trouble in getting himself taken before him instantly, and promised that he could relieve the pain at once. He had made a lucky guess that the chief's trouble was kidney stones. The medicine man must have been turning them out like buttons. Du Serre Felmon had enough morphine with him to last as long as he wanted to trade for gold. The natives gave him the gold, but the grateful medicine man bestowed on him, as the supreme gift, the initiation into the sacred brotherhood of the snakes."

I heaved a sigh of relief. "Well, that more or less explains how he took up this snake-bite practice," I said, "but what can you tell me about those bath salts of his that change any ordinary cur into a dog that can lick its weight in wildcats?"

"I wouldn't know about that," said the dentist. "What *are* these bath salts?"

So I told him what I had just seen at the Witch Doctor's house, winding up with the story of the way the tomcat backed down before the dog even touched him. I was still a bit excited about it, and perhaps I raised my voice a little too much. At any rate, when I got through, there was the drunk who had been standing at the bar, and apparently he had been listening to the whole story.

"*C'est tout un tour de passe-passe!*" he exclaimed angrily. "*Il est un charlatan, un sâle trompeur, un coquin damné!*"

"Quiet, quiet!" pleaded the bartender. "You will have to leave, if you use such language in here, m'sieu!"

"Oh, I will leave, never fear!" the man hiccupped. "But I

know what I am talking about. I tried that precious washing of his, that he claims will calm cats, and *I* tell you he is a fakir! And see what it got me!"

As he lurched past us, on his way to the door, he thrust his face into mine. I knew him at once. He was the little fellow who had fled from the handsome mulattress who hissed at him, there in the public square. And on his cheek were the scratches of a woman's claws.

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# 14

## THE GUTTER BOYS

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"AND so we have the murderer in a bottle!" the convict laughed in a high shrill voice.

Loren and I had been taking pictures in the far corner of the inner courtyard of the Colonial Hospital. Our guide, young Dr. Tasque, one of the two resident physicians, had stopped to speak with this *condamné* with the bandaged hand.

"Roget was my buddy. He was the finest man ever to come out here on *La Martinière*," the convict continued, now in a plaintive tone. "We made the journey together, he and I, and we have never been separated. Not until he was murdered by *this!*" He shook the bottle in his hand, and began to tap with his dirty, yellow broken nails the surface of the squat glass fruit jar, at the same time muttering, "Oh, if it only were alive! I should like so much to tear out its eyes!"

Young Dr. Tasque winked at me and beckoned to me to draw nearer.

"Pull yourself together, Bertin," he said, "Here, tell Mr. Smith about it. As you say, Roget was your friend."

"He and I worked always together," the convict said, turning toward me, eager for a new listener. "We worked at five different camps. But that last one! The one beyond the tenth kilometer, that was the worst one! The swamps are alive with insects and serpents. All the time we had to be on guard. But Roget, he was not afraid. Roget was afraid of nothing. He was the strongest

man in the Tenth Kilometer Camp. He was my friend. Oh!" He moaned, for a moment forgetting the continuity of his story, then went on:

"But in the last few weeks before *it* got him he had a touch of the fever. Not much, you understand. Nothing much hurt Roget, he was so strong. But he had to rest much. Sometimes I wasn't sure he could get through the day's work. He had to rest, as I have said. Every now and then he would sit down and take a nap."

"And the guards let him, didn't they, Bertin?" interrupted Dr. Tasque. "You see, Mr. Smith, they really aren't nearly so severe as they are painted to the outside world."

"Of course, of course, the guards let him," Bertin said impatiently, and proceeded almost without pausing to let the doctor finish his sentence. "But then they must, for when he worked . . . ah, then he was a giant! Roget, he did the work of five. But on this particular day when *it* got him he was asleep. The lunch period came. I did not want to wake him, so I took his share of the food, and set it aside to keep for him when he should awake. He was only fifteen or twenty meters away, leaning against a tree stump. When we were all ready to go back to work, and still he had not waked, then I went to him. I said, 'Come, come, Roget, my friend, it is time you awaken and eat some food. See, I have brought you your lunch.' But he did not answer, he did not wake. It was then that I saw he was dead."

He paused and again shook the bottle in his hand viciously.

"I looked at him, and he was dead. I saw something hanging out of his nose. I bent nearer. It looked like a huge angle-worm. 'What is this?' I cried. 'Guard, guard, come here, quickly! Quick! Roget is dead. He has been killed by a worm!'

"'What are you talking about, Bertin?' the guard said. 'A

man is not killed by a worm like that. Don't be silly, your friend Roget is just sleeping heavier than usual. It appears that the fever really has got him. We had better send him off to the hospital.'

"It was the Arab, Taugus, who then came up. He said, 'Oh, no, he is dead all right. No one could be deader. It is the Minute Snake that has got him. See, this is his tail hanging out of Bertin's nose. It is the smallest snake known to man. We have them in Africa too. It is very rare. Your friend is dead. There is no doubt of it. There is more poison to the square centimeter in that snake than in any natural concentrate.' That Arab, he was a cultivated fellow. He knew big words, he did. He also knew a murderer, any kind of a murderer, when he saw one. He ought to. He had been one himself, ten times over.

"Well, we pulled that snake out of Roget's nose. It must have crept up over his arm and neck, and onto his face, and up his nose while he slept so soundly, while we were eating our lunch. We found the bite. It was right inside the entrance to his left nostril. Oh, my poor friend, Roget!"

At this point the doctor plunged a pair of tweezers into the fruit jar and plucked out the rigid body of the tiny coiled snake. Loren photographed it. Then Bertin walked off, mumbling to himself, and we continued our tour of the hospital, which we had started late on the preceding afternoon.

"He's quite a dramatist, isn't he?" commented Dr. Tasque.

"He certainly is," I agreed. "Isn't he the man we saw in bed yesterday with the bandaged hand? He made a quick recovery. What's he doing up today?"

"Oh, he's practically well," said the doctor. "Now, there's a good example of the convict who inflicts a wound on himself, and then blames it on the Government."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Seven weeks ago he came to me. His hand was terribly swollen and infected. 'Doctor,' he said, 'I've hurt my hand working on a tractor.' But as soon as I opened it up I knew he was lying, the odor gave him away."

"The odor?"

"Yes, it was easy to reconstruct what had occurred. We've had such cases before. The man had taken a needle and thread and run it through fecal matter; then, plunging the needle into the palm of his hand, he had drawn the thread through, thus passing the infection into his blood stream. Of course his hand began to swell, but he kept it hidden for four or five days. He knew that if we should discover his trick during the first forty-eight hours, his sojourn in the hospital would be a much shorter one. Finally the pain became so great and the swelling so obvious that he could no longer disguise it from his overseers."

"Do you mean that he tortured himself in this fashion just to get seven weeks in the hospital?" I exclaimed. "Is the hospital food that much better?"

"No, it's not the food, so much as the leisure time," the doctor assured me. "He wouldn't have to work here. You know, of course, that we encounter all sorts of self-torture. Half our cots are filled with it, in one form or another."

I remembered having seen thirty or forty men in the ward upstairs. They had been bedded down, lying there in their pink and white pajamas reading or chatting with one another, and they had looked pretty comfortable to me. The whole place was spotlessly clean, with whitewashed walls and painted metal furniture, like any ward in an American hospital.

"It seems to me they have it rather soft," I commented.

"Yes, that's one reason of course why they like to come here,"

the doctor replied. "By the way, did you see the operating room yesterday? It is one of the most modernly equipped rooms in the world."

"No, I didn't," I answered. "I'd like to. May Mr. Tutell take some pictures of it?"

"Most certainly," the doctor replied.

He took us up to the second floor, and flung open the door to a big sunny room shining with gleaming white paint. There were tremendous glass windows, and a modern operating table. The smell of ether hung faintly in the air.

"This is wonderful!" I ejaculated. "The convicts certainly are well treated, aren't they?"

"Why, yes, indeed," Dr. Tasque said proudly. "And, besides, we use this room for the citizens of Cayenne, too, you know. I think we have had patients of every nationality and color in the world, here on this table. Butcherman, bakerman, lawyer, thief, we've had them all. I'm expecting the German colony right now."

"Germans!" I said surprised. "I didn't know there were any here."

"The German colony consists of one man," he explained with a smile. "He is a fellow who was formerly employed at the St. Hely gold placer, up in the interior. It's the biggest concern of its kind in all French Guiana, and it's run by Russians. But since Hitler has started his war with Russia this lone German is in a precarious position, and I wouldn't be surprised if the Soviet take it out on him any time now. Of course if the fracas happens while you're still here, M'sieu Smith, I'll let you know. You can come along and photograph it. One should have action in a picture if possible, shouldn't one, M'sieu Tutell?" The good doctor smiled at Loren, who was setting up his camera to snap the operating room.



The doctor shows Convict Bertin the snake that killed his buddy



The modernly equipped operating room at the hospital



The convicts prefer the hospital cots to working



Major Pean, of the Salvation Army (in white) and some of the convicts he feeds

The Government provides this dormitory for the *libérés*



Many *libérés* are fed by the Salvation Army, none by the Government



The Salvation Army headquarters are on the opposite side of Cayenne from the Colonial Hospital. They are exceedingly clean, and, as usual, under the efficient guidance of a divisional director, in this instance Major Pean. Major Pean has been in Cayenne since 1933, when the Salvation Army first opened its doors down there. His only helper is his wife. They have two children, boys aged five and six, cherubic golden-haired little angels, who contrast strangely with the filthy rags of the one hundred and twenty *libérés* who are fed gratuitously under the hospitable roof.

Major Pean welcomed me at the door and ushered me into the community room.

"Luncheon is about to be served," he said. "You're here just in time to take pictures."

The kitchen was outdoors, in a courtyard.

"Please come and examine the dishes we give the men," he went on. "Each man receives a bowl of soup, bread and a vegetable."

"But those over there," I pointed out, "look as though they're being served meat and other things."

"Yes, that is quite right, but they pay for those," he answered.

"Where do they get the money? Do they earn it?"

"No, they receive free tickets," the Major replied. "We sell tickets to support our work here, to all of the stores in Cayenne, and on Saturdays the storekeepers hand them out to the *libérés*. It is their form of charity."

The men moved quietly about, there was little conversation, and it was quite obvious that their chief preoccupation was in filling their stomachs.

"Well, they don't all seem to have been successful in getting tickets," I observed.

"No, that's true too," the Major answered. "Of course, there

aren't enough tickets to go completely around, and it's the early birds that catch them. I think it's sort of a game with the storekeepers; they like to see the men fighting for them. And, like a vicious circle, the strong get the choice ones, and they get strong because they get the tickets."

"Look here, Major," I said impulsively, "let me give you fifty francs for cigarettes for the men."

"Why, that would be fine," the Major smiled. "I'll have the Chinese storekeeper send them right over."

The Major left to give the order, and just then a *libéré* appeared at my side, a dwarflike creature, gnarled and stooped, with only a stump for a hand. He snarled at me from behind fragments of decayed and yellowed teeth:

"He'll only give us half. He'll keep the other twenty-five francs for himself."

"Why, the Major wouldn't do that!" I said indignantly.

"Major? He ain't no major, he's a thief," the *libéré* snarled.

"And what were you?" I asked. "What did you do to get here?"

"Me?" he leered. "I committed a *crime passionnel*. I murdered my sweetheart, and don't think she didn't deserve it!" His voice rose as he spoke, into a sort of hollow falsetto. I found it most unpleasant to listen to. Just then the Major returned.

"Major," I said, turning away from the dwarf, "here's one charity case that isn't very grateful. He's accusing you of keeping half the cigarette money for yourself. I certainly wouldn't want to waste my sympathy on many like him. But then, I suppose, he's the exception?"

"On the contrary," the Major shook his head sadly. "It is the exception who is appreciative, but we cannot expect otherwise. These are the dregs that congregate here. It is always so. The better element either get back to France or set up housekeeping

with a well-to-do black wife. Many of these fellows sleep in the gutter and get their food, like the urubus, from the garbage piles."

I shuddered at this comparison with the over-sized black vultures which are the city's scavengers. "Doesn't the French Government help you with your work here?" I asked.

"No, it does not contribute one sou toward our support."

"They really don't do anything for any of the *libérés*, do they?" I persisted.

"Well, it's not quite that bad," the Major said. "They do provide a few shelters, equipped with flat boards on which some of the men can sleep. But it doesn't even begin to take care of the hundreds that drift in and out of Cayenne."

"It seems very complicated and confusing," I said. "The officials have told me that the *doublage* system by which the convict, at the expiration of his term, was obliged to remain an equal number of years in the colony as a *libéré*, was abolished twenty months ago, and that actually there's no such thing as a *libéré* any more. Then why don't these men return to France and take their various places in everyday French life?"

"Yes, theoretically that is true," the Major went on patiently, "but you see they have no money, there are no ships by which to leave and they can't get passports, so what good does their technical freedom do them? There are a few one-time political prisoners who are men of independent means, who have plantations or shops here in town, and fare very nicely; but only one *libéré* who was sent here for a crime of violence has risen from the ranks to a position of independence. He could leave Guiana if he cared to, but he doesn't. That's Besseyria."

"Besseyria!" I exclaimed. "I've heard that name somewhere, but who is he? Why doesn't he want to leave?"

"He's a sculptor, and his carvings of tigers, in rare woods, have become famous the world over."

"Really? What does he charge for one?"

"A thousand francs," the Major informed me, "for the large ones, and five hundred for the small. He has married here, and has children. He claims he will never leave."

"He sounds interesting," I said. "I believe I'll go call on him."

"Why don't you?" Major Pean said. "His shop is only three blocks from here. Turn right at the corner, you can't miss it."

Monsieur Besseyria, a thin white-faced man with gold-rimmed pince-nez, was in the act of finishing a camel in purpleheart wood as I entered his store.

"What do you want?" he said petulantly.

"I'm an American traveler," I said, "and you've been recommended to me for your tigers. I understand that you carve them to order out of rare woods."

"Ha, ha," he jeered. "Of course you do!" He rose to his feet and stared at me. After about ten seconds of this I began to feel a bit uncomfortable.

"You *are* the sculptor, aren't you?" I asked.

"Yes, I am. A sculptor of camels, giraffes, ladies—dressed and undressed, young and old—cupids and alligators. But no tigers."

"But a tiger is what I'm interested in. I want it as a paper-weight for my desk at home," I persisted.

"Here, buy this camel. It will do."

"I don't want a camel, I want a tiger."

"You won't get one," the little man almost screamed at me. "I've just finished my thousandth, and I have all the money I want for the rest of my life, whether it's here in what they call Devil's Island, or in Paris with my mistress. I don't need the likes of you any more, nor I don't need your money. You can take this camel, or you can leave it. Just as you please. Or here's a beautiful lady, in satinwood," he added, almost as an afterthought.

"How much is she?" I asked meekly.

"Ten dollars American. I want no francs. I have enough of them."

I fished out two five dollar bills, and beat a speedy retreat, armed with the beautiful satinwood lady I had no wish for.

Farther up the road I came upon a small shop that was apparently open for business. Having got the buying habit, I entered. The owner, or attendant in charge, was a hunchback of about five feet, and seemed to have a big soul if not a good physique. He looked like a Latin, with his black eyes; and his distorted body in no way prevented his hopping all over the place, even vaulting counters with an agility that would have done credit to a seasoned athlete.

"Do you have anything interesting for sale?" I inquired.

"I most certainly do," he replied enthusiastically. "Why, there are butterflies for m'sieu to choose from, and snake skins and carvings on bone, done by 'the boys,' and some really remarkable stuffed toads. These toads are very fine." He stood off to admire them, cocking his huge head on one side. "They would shame a giant Polynesian land crab out of existence."

To me they were dreadful. Undaunted, he next offered three oil paintings on cardboard. They were covered with dust, but when he had wiped them clean they were rather good.

"In fact," he continued, "we have anything and everything that m'sieu could want as a memento of the penal colony."

His shop must have been thirty by fifty feet square, just one big empty room; and all of the one hundred-odd snake skins, butterflies, toads and suchlike oddities in the whole place would not have crowded a single showcase. Loren and I being the only travelers in Cayenne, I doubted that the store made four sales that year. And yet this little hunchback took as much interest in me as though I were the vanguard of dozens more, to arrive at any

second. He bustled about, assuming the air of a merchant who does eight hours of continuous selling every day. At the far end of the room stood several *condamnés*, smoking. Every few seconds the hunchback would call to them as though they were newly arrived clients:

“Just a minute! I will be with you as soon as I have satisfied this gentleman!”

They had not uttered a word, they just stood there blowing great rings of smoke, and staring at the walls in front of them. It was a grotesque frieze; they might have been Egyptian mummies in wrappings of candy-striped cotton.

“Probably m’sieu would be interested in this.” He held out for my inspection a small fish carved with great ingenuity out of a single block of wood.

“Then again he may want to choose from this line.” Once more he motioned toward a counter on which were stretched four small snake skins, the longest less than three feet over all. “Very rare, m’sieu, very rare indeed,” he chirped. “We are offering them for a special price today. Fifteen francs for the four of them. Forty cents American for the lot.”

I bought a convict’s oil painting of Devil’s Island and a lion carved from horn, for seventy cents American. There was no wrapping paper, so I put the lion in my pocket. The picture, which was small, I tucked under my arm. There was no cash in the till with which the dealer might make change.

“M’sieu will understand,” said the dwarf, bowing. “It has all been given out to the last customer in change for one big bill. The bill I have sent to the bank for safekeeping. These are hard times, m’sieu. There might be thieves about.”

He wagged his head and clucked. An empty store, nothing to sell and no one to sell it to.

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# 15

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## THE FIVE GLASS CAKE-JARS

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FIVE of us were sitting one night at a sidewalk table in front of the Hôtel des Palmistes. Three were young men connected with the police, minor officials in the Gendarmerie; and the fourth was a young doctor attached to the staff of the Colonial Hospital, on the other side of the public square.

In the dusk of the ill-lighted street, a strange grotesque figure came wandering along. At first glance I thought that its steps were aimless and drunken, for it zigzagged from side to side in the gutters. Then I concluded it must be searching for some lost object, for I saw that each sidewise jogging brought it to some scrap of refuse lying in the street, at which, stooping over, it would peer intently.

"*Le petit Zo-Zo* is searching for his dinner," observed one of my companions with a laugh. "But the vultures have been too early for him."

The others chuckled.

The shambling figure came gradually closer and finally paused directly in front of our table. He was less man than creature, a thing dressed in rags of indescribable filth. He straightened up, stood firmly on his bare feet, lifted his chin and stared at us with a look of defiance in his glittering black eyes. He held out one thin and dirty claw, begging.

"Be off, Zo-Zo," said one of the police officials impatiently. "Get out of here! You are enough to make one sick!"

But the creature only moved a step nearer, whining that he wanted a smoke, and paid no attention to the command. The Gendarmerie clerk nearest him thrust out a long leg, twirled the beggar around with the tip of his foot, and sent him on his way with a playful kick *à derrière*. The bundle of rags hurried off to a safe distance, then sat down at the edge of the gutter and looked back expectantly at the tables. Someone tossed him the butt of a half-smoked cigarette. He seized it, tucked it away in his rags, and waited for more.

"Who on earth is he?" I asked. "Or, I should say, who *was* he?"

My companions answered only by shrugs of their shoulders, and a laugh.

"Oh, *il est fou, il est fou*," said one, carelessly. "He's nuts, he's a screwball. He's a nuisance, this Zo-Zo."

But I persisted; for in spite of the man's wild look and filthy clothing, in spite of his matted kinky hair and his somewhat negroid nose, his forehead was broad, almost noble, and even in his squalor he seemed to cling to some remembered dignity of birth. I wondered what his parentage had been.

"Has he any European blood?" I asked, finding it impossible to take my eyes off the wretched figure who still sat, mumbling to himself, at the curb.

"Who knows?" said one of our party, carelessly. "You are the first person, if I may say so, m'sieu, who has ever cared enough to inquire. I believe I have heard it said that his father was either a Frenchman or an Arab from Morocco, I don't know which. It seems to me that an Arab was somewhere in this fellow's background, but I never knew how or why. At any rate, the father was a convict, I'm sure of that. He served his time in a lumber camp, out in the jungle. The mother was a native woman, and she stuck

to her convict friend all through his years of hard labor. Finally she gave birth to a son—that fellow you are looking at—and died in the delivery, there in the bush. The father had already skipped out, having come to the end of his *libéré* term, and had managed to get back to France, or Morocco, or wherever it was that he hailed from. So there was the baby, *le petit Zo-Zo*, newborn, without either father or mother, squalling in a hut in the forest.

“Luckily, or unluckily, for him, an old black crone, toothless and bent with age, had come along just before the mother drew her last breath, and promised the dying woman to care for the brat as her own. This hag was a practitioner of *obeah*, the voodoo hocus-pocus they carry on down here in Guiana, and when the child became old enough she taught him the lore and the practice of her trade. But *le petit Zo-Zo* was never strong mentally. He was probably afflicted from birth, and must have been a problem even to his foster-mother. You noticed that wild gleam in his eyes, didn’t you? Well, the blacks in this town believe that he was born with the Evil Eye, and it may have been that the old woman started that rumor herself. But all that happened—if it ever happened at all—many years ago, for even the old-timers say that the hag has been dead for close to twenty years.”

“How has he managed to keep alive since the old woman died?” I asked.

“Well, as I say, the blacks think he is possessed of the Evil Eye, and they are afraid of him. They are sure that he has traffic with the supernatural, so they give him scraps of food and help him out in one way or another. And it’s not only the blacks who think he is gifted with uncanny powers. The native Cayennais believe that he knows what is going to happen in the future. Did you happen to notice that that group of natives muttered something as they passed by him, just now? They were probably muttering some

incantation which would protect them against any malign influence that he might be shedding around him. And there's an old shrew down the street who has always claimed that back in 1910 or thereabouts, when Zo-Zo was only a child, he predicted the exact date when war would break out in 1914."

"I have heard," another contributed, "that Zo-Zo always knows when a convict has escaped, whether the man gets safely away or not. Even if the convict is killed away off in the bush somewhere, Zo-Zo seems to know it long before the news comes over the colony grapevine."

"Well, the superstitious may be afraid of offending him," laughed another of my acquaintances, "but to us he is merely a nuisance we tolerate only because he sometimes diverts us with his antics. Look at the poor devil, now!"

We glanced in Zo-Zo's direction. To my surprise, he was now giving us his full attention, returning stare for stare. His hand was lifted, and he was pointing his long dirty forefinger at each of us in turn, as though he were denouncing us. His lips were moving, but he was too far from us to be heard.

"Hey, Zo-Zo, what are you saying?" one of the Gendarmerie men called to him, laughingly. "Are you putting a curse on us?"

Zo-Zo obligingly raised his voice a little, without interrupting the movement of the pointing forefinger. He was merely counting.

"One! Two! Three! Four! Five!" we heard him chant. He got to his feet and took a step or two that put him even farther from us. "There are five of you, gentlemen!" he called back over his shoulder, as he shuffled hurriedly off. "Have you got a glass jar for yourself as well as your friends, Doctor?"

He faded away into the night.

"Glass jar?" I exclaimed, mystified. "What on earth is he talking about?"

The three young Gendarmerie clerks grinned. "God knows!"

said one of them. "We told you he's crazy, didn't we? Shall we have another drink?"

But the young doctor from the hospital rose to his feet abruptly. "No, I really must be getting on back to work," he said. "There are several patients I must look in on. Thank you, gentlemen, but I must say good night."

He turned toward me. "I'm sorry to be going," he said, shaking hands. "I wonder if you would care to call on me tomorrow morning, at all? I've something to show you which I think will interest you. You will come to the hospital, then?"

I assured him that I would. I was very curious to learn what it was he had to show me, but said nothing more. Something in his manner indicated that this was not the time or place for questions. It was plain that if he had wished to explain his invitation in the presence of the three Gendarmerie officials he would have done so.

The sun was high above Cayenne, next morning, when I woke. In fact, it was the first morning in some days that I had missed the march of the Senegalese. These black troops who constitute France's garrison in the penal colony go through a routine drill and march through the streets of the little capital each morning, at about six o'clock. The tramp of their feet on the road, when the rest of the city is so quiet, had never before failed to waken me; but apparently the preceding evening had made me oversleep. I had no more than finished breakfast when it was time to keep my engagement at the hospital.

This building, which from the front appears rather small, is in reality one that covers a large expanse of ground. It is long and deep; and inside its courtyard there are numerous small structures, cell blocks and dormitories housing the prisoners who fall sick. My friend the doctor arrived on the heels of the messenger by whom I had sent in my name, and invited me first to see his living

quarters, which were also on the grounds. On the way we visited his laboratory and he showed me tests which he and another doctor were making as to the chemical constituents of a certain aphrodisiac which had been brought to them by Indians from the interior. According to the natives, this "restorer of lost strength" was possessed of a miraculous potency and had been known to them for generations. We then went into his sitting room, where he invited my inspection of a number of Indian arrows and other strangely fashioned implements of war which he had obtained from tribes in the remote forests. We had been examining these objects for perhaps ten minutes when he turned to me and said, "I know you are curious to see what I promised last night to show you. *Bien*, we are going there now, and I think you will soon agree with me that never before have you seen anything like it, nor will again."

Without another word he left the room and motioned to me to follow. I smiled at his cryptic speech and air of mystery, thinking that the doctor was putting on this show of profound secrecy merely because he hadn't weathered the preceding evening as successfully as I had. I was very soon to change my mind. What I was to see was so repulsive that I felt he had, if anything, done his best to prepare me for the horror.

We passed through various buildings and courts, encountering convicts who apparently suffered from every known type of ailment, and came to a small hut, standing apart from the other buildings, which was guarded by a native soldier who, at our arrival, leaped to attention. The doctor took a key from his pocket and, opening the door, motioned for me to enter before him, then followed me and quickly closed the door behind us. We were in almost complete darkness.

Only a faint ray of light filtered through a crack in a heavily shuttered window at our left. As I stood there, waiting until my

eyes were accustomed to the darkness, I slowly became conscious that at the opposite side of the room there was something standing by the wall, and that the whole room was filled with some disturbing, unseen presence. I felt the doctor's hand upon my sleeve, and controlled an impulse to jump back. With his hand on my elbow, still silent, he propelled me forward across the room until we stopped just before bumping into the opposite wall.

Then he released me and I could hear him rummaging around in his pockets for a match. It seemed hours before he found one, and in all that time—perhaps it was only five seconds, but I thought they would never end—he spoke not a word. At the first scratch of the match on the box, I almost jumped out of my shoes. He tried again. This time there was a tiny flare. I could now see, in its faint flicker, that we were standing beside a long table, covered with a white cloth, and on it stood a candle. The doctor bent over and lighted this candle. As the wick's flame brightened he lifted the candle and held it high over his head, so that its light fell on the wall.

I have mentioned all these details because they took my mind completely off the reason for our visit, the unknown I had been invited to see. I had momentarily forgotten that, so engrossed had I been in watching the doctor. When at last he turned toward the wall and the light from that flickering candle illuminated the blotched plaster and glinted on the five glass jars the shock was one that stopped me like a bullet.

What I had thought to be a vague shape standing by the wall was in reality a long shelf. Upon it stood the five glass containers, like big cake-jars on a pantry shelf. In each jar, smiling at me, was a human head.

"Here, take the candle, please," I heard the doctor saying, "and I will lift them down."

The candle shook in my hand. It sent grotesque shadows sud-

denly leaping over the leprous walls. The doctor took down the jars, one by one, and deftly lifted the heads from them, one by one. As he ranged them along the table, the shadows from the shaking candle flitted across the eyeless faces and seemed to make them come alive. The five pairs of grinning lips distinctly seemed to move.

"Good God!" I exclaimed, shrinking back. "Who are these men?"

"Those," said the young doctor, blandly, "are the Five Heads of Guiana—the five most infamous criminals the colony has ever guarded."

I stared at them, unable to take my eyes away. They were not fleshless bone as a skull is. Enough of flesh and skin, though shrunken until it had contracted to a parchment-like shell, had remained to clothe each skull with the look of life. Even the eyelids were there, half-closed, leering at us, as if with a knowledge of something that we had not yet learned. . . .

"They are, or were, the worst—and therefore the best—specimens of criminals we ever had here," the doctor went on smoothly, evidently gratified by the completeness with which his little "surprise" had horrified me. "That is precisely why these five particular heads were selected—not only because each one was 'tops' as a criminal, but because each one represents a different race. There is a white man, a black man, a red man, a yellow man and an Arab who may be a mixture of the other four. The quintet that shows man at his worst. Therefore, as each of them came to the end of life—sometimes by the guillotine, sometimes by other equally urgent means—his head was added to the collection. The idea, of course, is to provide a good working collection for any anthropologist or criminologist who may wish to study them."

The five heads rested there, looking at us, still grinning, as if his remarks amused them to the marrow.

"And so they have been preserved as you see," the doctor continued. "Through some strange freak of nature, this incandescent climate of ours has combined with the skill of the embalmer to give us these gentlemen in a permanent state of vivacity." He nudged me, and I felt like a scared rabbit. "Go ahead, ask them anything you like. They haven't even lost their tongues."

I couldn't look away from the things, much as I wanted to.

"No?" he said, when I remained silent. "Well, let me introduce them. The one farthest to your right is the Arab. Next to him is Monanda, the Negro, who during his life murdered seventeen men. That hairless yellow-skinned devil in the center is the Annamite from Indo-China, who poisoned his victims with a drug that made them die in indescribable torture. The bald madman to the Annamite's right is an East Indian from Pondicherry. And the fifth, the first one at your left, is the white man, the Frenchman who was guillotined here for murder."

He began laughing.

"What's so funny?" I asked. My lips felt dry.

"Well, the joke of that was," he explained between chuckles, "on the day after we guillotined him we got word that the court had made a mistake. This fellow had never killed anybody. We had executed the wrong man!"

I looked again at the face of the man who had paid with his life for a crime of which he was innocent. This time, he didn't seem to be grinning.

"Then why do you put him here with the rest?" I cried indignant.

The young doctor winked at me. "What's the difference?" he chuckled. "Doesn't he look just as guilty as the rest of them?"

I said that I would like to get outdoors and into the sun. The air inside was stale and chill. It smelled of things underground, of things unclean.

"Go ahead," said the doctor. "I'll come along in just a moment, as soon as I put these gentlemen back in their glass jars."

I groped my way to the door and opened it. Never before had the sun seemed so wonderful.

This happened when I first visited French Guiana. I said to myself that day that nothing would ever induce me to look at those five severed heads for a second time. But neither did I expect, at that time, ever to see Zo-Zo again.

This year, when I again visited Cayenne, I was confronted one day in the street by an apparition in rags, who held out a filthy paw for a coin. I tried to pass by and then I recognized him. It was *le petit Zo-Zo*, the creature who lived by the mercy of God. And he laughed when he saw that I remembered him.

"What did m'sieu think of the five heads?" he demanded boldly, as if only a day had passed since then.

"They were—" I began, and then I stopped in amazement. "How the devil did *you* ever learn about that?" I exclaimed.

His eyes glittered. "How many of them were alive?" he cackled. "Were there any dead except one?"

"Dead? What on earth are you talking about, Zo-Zo? They were as dead as doornails, of course!"

"You think so, m'sieu?" he sneered, impudently. "You had better look again! Take a barber with you, m'sieu. For four of them, at least, will need him. But the Arab is dead, never fear. I saw to that from the first, for he was kind. He is luckier than the others, who *cannot* die."

He shambled off, mumbling to himself, and I stared after him, thinking that his addled wits had left him completely since last I saw him. But, try as I would, I could not dismiss his ridiculous assertion from my mind.

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## THE FIVE GLASS CAKE-JARS

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I decided that I must see those five heads once more, or never know another night's sleep.

The young doctor who had first exhibited them to me was no longer in Guiana. But I had no difficulty in discovering their present whereabouts. They had been transferred from their former home to a closet in the morgue.

The official who obligingly fished them out of their glass cake-jars and gave me permission to photograph them must have wondered at my gasp. He couldn't have seen them, as I had, when their skulls and their cheeks were shaven clean.

And on the Negro's skull, and on that of the East Indian, *hair had grown out!* The lips and chins of the Frenchmen and the Annamite were bearded, *as they had never been before.*

Only the Arab's smooth face remained unchanged. He had been Zo-Zo's friend. Zo-Zo had seen to it that he need not go on living after death.

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# 16

## THE ROCKS OF KOUROU

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I HEARD a tap at the door; in my dreams it sounded like thunder.

"What do you want?" I called sleepily. It was pitch black outside.

"Time to get up, M'sieu Smeeth—it's four-thirty." It was Marcel the Strong Man speaking. He never seemed to rest, day or night. "I shall have a cup of hot chocolate waiting for you downstairs when you are ready."

I was joined at breakfast by Harvey Blalock, who was accompanying Loren and me on the trip to the Rocks of Kourou.

"Captain Richard ought to be here any moment now," I said. "It's five o'clock."

"What's all that noise outside?" Loren asked.

"Oh, that's forty of my boys who've been in town over the week end," Blalock replied. "They're ready to go back up to the airplane field to work."

"You mean the airplane field that you're still trying to get permission to build?" Loren smiled.

Blalock ignored the remark and said, "They're clearing the bush. We have to have a level spot first before we can do any building."

Captain Richard drove up and we were off. A half-hour trip by launch brought us to a waiting camion on the far side of the river; there we boarded the truck for our forty-eight-kilometer journey to the Rocks of Kourou.

Waiting to join us on the camion was Dr. Floch, his only equipment being a large collection of bottles for specimens.

"Well, Doc, do you expect to do some hunting today?" I asked.

"Don't worry, M'sieu Smith," he countered, "I shall not have to hunt; the little ones will land right in my lap. Perhaps you do not know that this is a single-lane highway we are about to traverse. The overhanging vegetation will sweep right into the open truck, and the insects will be hunting me instead."

He was quite right. Immediately upon leaving the river, the truck started to lunge and plunge through as dense jungle as we had yet encountered. The seats were latticed boards and very hard. It was only through concerted effort that we could retain them. The foliage swept in on us as we passed it, constantly depositing insects and beetles and bugs on our various persons until it became a game to see who could collect the largest assortment. Dr. Floch was in his element. He was so busy receiving our contributions he had no time to tell us what each one was, and only arrested his endeavors when we reached the eighth kilometer.

Here we encountered a group of road workers. They were convicts, most of whom were naked to the waist. Two of them were Arabs, the other four Frenchmen. They were pounding wet oily red stones into gravel for the road, in a particularly muddy stretch where it was obviously needed. There was a military overseer in charge of them and Captain Richard wanted to talk to him, so we set up our cameras for a few shots. But it started to rain. The red sweat on their bodies turned into muddy rivulets of rusty brown, giving them the appearance of having been in a fight and being covered with blood.

A drive of two more kilometers brought us to the camp, which was the headquarters for several dozen convict laborers, maintenance gangs for the road, and woodcutters in the surrounding

jungle. We stopped in front of the main dormitory, a long thatch-roofed building, which extended back for some fifty feet. It had no solid walls, but lattices that allowed for every possible breath of air, and made the building much more sanitary. The first one to leave the truck was the doctor, carrying his precious specimen bottles with him.

"What are you going to catch now, Doctor?" I asked with my usual curiosity.

"Come along with me, and see," he answered. "I have an idea."

He entered the dormitory and we followed. Lining the sides were two rows of canvas cots resting on frames of natural wood, and attractive in appearance. Supports from the roof held mosquito netting for each individual cot. It was new, and clean-looking. Dr. Floch paused at the first cot and was already peering into the folds of netting.

"Just as I thought," he muttered to himself. "An *Anopheles* mosquito."

Then scrutinizing the netting even more carefully, he clapped a specimen bottle over several more he found, and added, "There are at least a dozen right in this one netting."

"But look, Doc," I interposed, "it isn't even tied together. They've left it open for all the mosquitoes in the world to come and go as they like."

"But of course! Now I have the proof of what I have suspected for some time," he hastened on. "The reason why there are so many malarial cases from the Tenth Kilometer Camp. We give them the best equipment, as you yourself can see, M'sieu Smith, and they treat it in this fashion."

The doctor then turned on a sickly-faced convict who had just entered the hut. "Fools, all of you!" he barked, stamping his foot on the hard earthen floor. "A new netting, as good as any in the



DEAD OR ALIVE? FRENCHMAN, EAST INDIAN, ANNAMITE, NEGRO, ARAB



ZO-ZO'S FOREHEAD WAS BROAD, ALMOST NOBLE



The Haunted House



The Semaphore Tower and Dun-  
geon



Laijros carries Tutell's Suitcase



Laijros and the Author



Main Dormitory, Kourou



The Convicts' Cots

THE CONVICTS AT KOUROU AND AT THE ROCKS OF KOUROU

country, and it is purposely left open for the mosquitoes to fly in. It's worse than nothing, for this way it is a receptacle for them. Is it yours?" He glared at the miserable wretch, who swayed drunkenly in front of him, obviously a victim of malaria. "Answer me, is it yours?"

The convict shook his head in apathetic fashion, and murmured, "They are nearly all like that." And so they were.

"At times I wonder what is the use of struggling with these people," Dr. Floch said disgustedly and shook his head. "They are all the same."

I felt inclined to agree with him. Here was another example which showed me that the convicts' lot was not so hard as pictured. The doctor sighed—a deep discouraged sigh. Then he straightened his shoulders and, smiling, said, "Well, well, M'sieu Smith, you must forgive me. I don't often have moments like that. Actually I'm tremendously interested in my work, a part of which is, as you know, research. Now, for instance, in Cayenne we have the Stegomyia mosquito, which in past years was the scourge of this hemisphere as the carrier of yellow fever. The Stegomyia, unlike the Anopheles, which carries malaria and lives in the jungle, dwells in houses in and about town. It breeds in the clogged drain pipes of which I have spoken before. We have found them, for example, at L'Hospice, the hospital for incurables. Now, at this hospital there happened to be among other inmates, thirty lepers, desperately poor men, taken off the streets, without families, friends or money, in advanced stages of the disease. I recently made an interesting discovery. The Stegomyia mosquito in this particular hospital has bacilli that present all the same symptoms as the bacilli of leprosy. Perhaps you do not know that the bacilli of leprosy have been isolated by De Hansen, the famous Norwegian scientist. Now, of course, so far I only dare be hopeful. I do not *know* that

these mosquitoes are definitely the carriers of the disease, but it is another road to explore."

"But wait a minute, Doctor," I interrupted him, perplexed. "You said these thirty men you took off the street were in advanced stages. So the mosquito couldn't have infected them."

"No, no, I do not make myself clear," he explained. "I am hoping to determine whether the *Stegomyia* mosquito can be a carrier of the De Hansen bacilli, to discover whether it bites the leper, picks up the bacilli and can thus infect a healthy person. There, do you see it now?"

"Yes," I said, studying in my mind the enormous possibilities of this theory. "Now, what about the leprosorium at Kourou where we are bound today? . . ."

"Oh," he said enthusiastically, "I'm very anxious for it to be finished. I do want to continue my researches with well-isolated cases."

"Is the Government financing it?" I asked.

"Only indirectly. It is borrowing six million francs from the Bank of Guiana for a twenty-five-year period, and this is to be paid back through a slight tax on the importation of foodstuffs, cigarettes and liquors."

I turned to Captain Richard, who had just finished his conversation outside with the *Surveillant*, and had joined us in the dormitory.

"Your Bank of Guiana must be very solvent to make a loan of this nature," I observed.

"It is," the Captain agreed, "but then when you realize that the colony has produced two hundred and eighty thousand pounds of gold in the past fifty-odd years, there's nothing remarkable about that. And, besides, the surface has only been scratched," he added almost as an afterthought. "With modern machinery we

probably could have mined successfully twenty-five times that amount."

"What happens to all this gold?" I asked. Dr. Floch was carrying his specimens back to the truck.

"Most of it went to the United States to banks in New York. Since the war—it went by plane," Captain Richard replied—"it goes south to Brazil and the Argentine."

"Why the change of policy in particular?"

"Well, because twice this spring it was seized by the British," he said. "You know that the Pan-American plane lands in Trinidad. The first time the British had little to say, intimated it must have been stolen. But the second time they admitted seizure. So we hadn't much choice in the matter."

Dr. Floch rejoined us. "As I was saying, M'sieu Smith," he said, "about the leprosorium. Of course, you know many of the buildings are already standing from the time when Kourou was a large convict camp. They will need only a small amount of renovating."

About two and a half hours after leaving Cayenne we found ourselves at the Kourou River, the end of our journey by camion. Here we entered a small motor launch, whose engineer was waiting to greet us. He was the Mayor of Kourou. Kourou and the Rocks of Kourou we soon found to be two different places. The Rocks are on the sea, directly across from Devil's Island, and the town of the same name is a mile inland on the edge of the river.

The launch pulled up to a long stone causeway; at the far end was a tumbledown two-story house, of all the colors in the rainbow. Outlined against the now leaden skies it looked as abject and forlorn as a tired reveler on his way home from a masque ball. Just beyond was the open sea, an ominous gray, lapping hungrily at the rockbound shore-line. The house fascinated me far

more than the seven convicts and their three overseers who had gathered at the pier to meet us.

Introductions were hardly over before, pointing at the dismal structure, I burst out with, "What in the world is it?"

The *Surveillant* smiled and replied, "We call it the haunted house of Kourou."

"Does anyone live there?"

"Oh, yes, two of the convicts." He nodded toward the group of *condamnés* who were already packing our photographic paraphernalia over to the camp. "And they wish they didn't."

"Why? Are they afraid of ghosts?"

"Yes, they're both murderers, and they claim they see and hear their victims every night."

Just then the last of the *condamnés* passed, lugging Loren's suitcase on his shoulder. The *Surveillant* went on, "Now there's one that wouldn't be afraid to sleep in the haunted house. I doubt if any ghost would bother him."

"Well, perhaps he never murdered anyone," I objected.

"On the contrary, do you know who that is?" he said. "But of course you don't. He's been here for twelve years now, and all his crimes took place in Paris. His name is Laijros, the famous Taxi Murderer of the late '20's. He did away with seven victims before the law caught up with him. He's one of the few prisoners who accepts his lot now without complaint, although he stoutly maintains he's innocent and that he was sent here only on circumstantial evidence. He's a good fellow, a hard worker and no trouble. Once in a while, if he has a few francs in his pocket, he gets away to the town of Kourou and gets drunk on tafia, but he always comes straight back here, and to bed with his hangover. So no one says very much."

"How long is his sentence?" I asked.

"Life," the *Surveillant* replied tersely. "The Government knew what it was doing, all right. A man who removes seven people from this world without their permission has to be stopped somewhere. After all, there are limits, don't you think?"

"Rather," I said. We were just approaching the camp proper. I saw directly ahead a four-tiered tower rising from the rocky outcroppings which were "the Rocks" of Kourou. Beside the tower was a funny-looking little shed with huge disks rising from a scaffolding above it. "Look, what in the world is this?" I inquired.

"Oh, that's the old lookout tower for Devil's Island," he explained. "The low shed beside it used to be a dungeon."

"Can you see Devil's Island from the top of the tower?" I asked. "I've never been this close to it on the mainland. When I visited it seven years ago I went there by boat from St. Laurent."

"Of course you can see it from anywhere, at eye level. It's only twelve miles out," he replied. "The tower was constructed as a lookout to watch for runaways. The convicts used to build canoes and try to reach shore. But now we use the semaphore system, and signal with the disks."

"Do you think I could take some pictures of that in action?" I suggested.

"Most certainly. Laijros will give you a demonstration," he answered. "I must be off with Dr. Floch to examine some of the buildings. I'll see you later." He smiled and left.

Laijros was happy to oblige and did it so efficiently that I wondered if the opportunity might not sometime arise for him to send a false message to the Island and thereby effect a pal's escape.

"Say, listen," Loren said, "there are three islands out there. Which is Devil's?"

"That's the one on the left. The other two are St. Joseph and Ile Royale."

"But," Loren protested, "Devil's Island looks so small. How can they keep so many prisoners on that little atoll?"

"Oh, didn't you know?" I explained, "Devil's Island is just the one where they keep the political prisoners. There has never been more than seven of them at any one time."

The Rocks of Kourou Camp consisted of a dozen or so buildings of various sizes, most of them with the windows barred or grilled. There was a nice breeze off the ocean, but the place seemed desolate and uninviting even for a leprosorium.

From the semaphore station, we wandered down to the beach. Loren reached the water's edge a few steps ahead of me, and I heard him give an exclamation of surprise.

"For heaven's sake!" he called over his shoulder. "Look at these mud-skippers!"

"Look at what?" I asked, as I slipped and skidded over the rocks. I had on tennis shoes, and wished that I didn't.

He was bending over to watch a school of tiny fish that were skittering through the shallow water, just out of reach.

"They're mud-skippers; some people call 'em mud-springers," he repeated. "It's the only fish I know of that spends as much time on land as it does in the water. It is not supposed to be found in the Western Hemisphere but this certainly is the real thing."

"Go on!" I said skeptically. "Who told you so, you old fishologist?"

"You forget, my friend," said Loren with a lordly air, "that for the past ten years I've been going on marine expeditions with the scientists of the Shedd Aquarium staff, as chief photographer. I've met more fish face to face than people."

"Nothing personal, I hope?" I flung at him, as I watched these queer little freaks of the fish world, no longer than my finger, which by now had wriggled themselves entirely out of the water

and were actually pushing themselves along the gravelly beach, just as seals waddle along on the rocks. "This is beyond belief! How long can they stay out of the water?"

"Oh, ten minutes or so," said Professor Tutell. "Long enough to gobble up some mosquitoes or gnats. Want me to explain how they do it? Just below those protruding eyes, the mudskipper has tiny pockets or sacs of spongy tissue. While in the water, these pockets soak themselves full. When it comes ashore, this water slowly trickles down onto its gills, and from the water it extracts enough oxygen to keep it going for a few minutes. It also rolls its eyes around so that they pick up water from the sacs, just as we blink our eyes to moisten them from our lids. But of course it has to dive back into the water every few minutes to get a fresh supply. They're really amazing, aren't they?"

"I'll say they are!" I agreed. "If I hadn't seen them with my own eyes, I'd have thought you the prize fish-story-teller of all time! Well, let's be on our way."

We started off across meadows and a bit of jungle for the town of Kourou, where we were to have an early lunch.

"I hope luncheon is going to be good," I remarked.

"Well, I'm afraid you're going to be disappointed," Captain Richard answered. "You see, I neglected to order a picnic box put up for us, so I asked the Mayor to arrange something with a friend of his. He told me the food would be quite enjoyable, but we might not like the accommodations."

"What did he mean by that?"

"Just that the town of Kourou doesn't boast a modern restaurant," Richard went on. "It may not be too clean. I don't know, I've never been there."

It grew hotter and hotter as we left the coast behind us, and I couldn't help remarking what I would give for an ice-cold drink.

"Oh, that is one thing we can count on," Richard hastened to assure me. "I did bring a thermos filled with ice, and the Mayor took that along with him."

We were being accompanied by the Taxi Murderer and a friend of his, who between them were carrying our equipment. I was having difficulty just carrying myself in the heat. The town of Kourou was only a mile inland, but it seemed to me like ten. The house where we were to lunch was a ramshackle two-story building, decrepit, musty and filled with cobwebs. But the meal which was served to us was one fit for a king. Over a huge circular table, in a little back room, had been spread a superb tablecloth of the finest damask. Heavy linen napkins, beautifully monogrammed, reposed at every plate. The china was not of the twentieth century, and the silver was massive and ornate. The flat silver-ware was "coin" and held the lustrous satiny finish of decades of polishing. And at each place stood two magnificent old crystal goblets. We were not drinking water that day. Commencing with hors d'oeuvres we progressed triumphantly through a cheese soufflé, chicken sauté with mushrooms, roast pork with a green vegetable, and a piece of pastry for dessert.

"What were you doing, Captain?" I stopped feasting long enough to say. "Pulling our legs when you warned us we wouldn't get much to eat?"

The Captain just smiled.

"I am as pleasantly surprised as you, Monsieur Smith."

Immediately after luncheon we set off on our return journey for Cayenne. I was feeling most contented, and would have enjoyed a good catlike nap if the jolting of the camion hadn't prevented such a thought. What a superb luncheon, and with such magnificent appointments, at the very edge of the world! It didn't seem to me to make sense.

"Captain, I don't understand it," I said. "That innkeeper must have spent a fortune on his linens, his glass, his china. Where does he get sufficient trade to make it worth while? Besides I don't see how anyone could have collected possessions like that unless from some antique shop in Paris, London, or New York. Why, they were the last word!"

"It was strange, wasn't it?" the Captain replied, "but you know this entire district of Kourou has a very peculiar history. I never thought of it before. But what you say has given me an idea.

"All of the district of Kourou, comprising the Rocks and the town and in fact many square miles of bush stretching for some distance into the interior, was a gift from Louis XV to the Duc de Choiseul shortly after the middle of the eighteenth century. The duke decided to send an expedition to his new possession, and placed at the head of it his young brother, the Chevalier Turgot, who recruited a large number of soldiers of fortune from Alsace and Lorraine. This all happened not long after the peace of 1763, so that these men, who were temporarily out of a job, were more than willing to cross the sea in the hope of finding gold in this mythical continent of El Dorado. They were accompanied on the expedition by bourgeois storekeepers, artists, artisans of all sorts. And here, Monsieur Smith, is possibly our key to the mystery of the Mayor's silver. The Chevalier Turgot also brought with him gentlemen and ladies of high social standing, who embarked not only with trunks of satin breeches and wardrobes of crinoline dresses, but with chests of family silver, glass and china and other inherited *meubles* with which to decorate their homes in the new world. It was a motley group that reached the wild coast line of Guiana.

"All the ladies of fashion wished to live in Kourou as they had in Europe. Life to them was little more than one pleasure party after another; and this under a hot tropical sun took its toll.

Debauches which they had been able to survive without inconvenience in Paris so weakened them in this climate that the gigantic task of building a real colony became of less and less interest to them. Gradually their bad example affected the artisans and the soldiers of fortune, until the entire expedition was demoralized. Chevalier Turgot was too young and inexperienced to cope with the situation, and so Fate stepped in. The members of the expedition fell victims to an epidemic of typhus fever which literally carried them off—to the last soul."

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# 17

## THE MAN IN THE TIGER

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"MONSIEUR, there are many tragic pages in the history of Kourou which are to be found in the government files—that is, all but one page, and I alone can give you that story. I, André Giraudeau, the oldest prospector in all French Guiana!"

My host, a Cayennais of some three score years and ten, sat opposite me in the cool dark interior of his town house. On the coffee table between us stood two glasses of Perrier water and a small bowl of ice. Monsieur sipped his drink with the leisurely air of a connoisseur.

"Do give me the story of that one page, monsieur," I said curiously. My host had a tale to tell; I knew the symptoms.

"It goes back many years to one of my earliest prospecting trips. I was a young man then and ventured far afield. Now, it happened that I had crossed the Maroni River into Dutch Guiana, and found myself for several months in a section largely inhabited by Carib Indians. The authority in that district was vested in a certain *piaiman*, or medicine man, named Ventilius, not because of inherited position, but because of fear. He was credited by the Indians with great and marvelous powers, and many were the stories of the cures he had effected; and also, although this was only whispered, of the people he had put out of the way.

"One evening I was visiting his house and enjoying some of the native liquor, of which he was particularly fond, when he stepped entirely out of character for an Indian and astounded me

by saying (he was already a little drunk), 'Have you got anything you wanted in life, when you wanted it? Perhaps the wife of another man, for instance?'

"His words went something like that, but I was so surprised I don't remember them exactly. It is most unusual for a Carib *piaiman*, even if one knew him very well, to talk in such a familiar manner. I must have looked rather startled, for as he refilled his cup, he repeated his question. 'No, I can't say that I have,' I answered a bit stiffly.

"To my further bewilderment a rather sinister expression spread slowly over his face. 'I have,' he said. 'Many times.'

"'And didn't the husbands resent it?' I couldn't help asking.

"'When once I had decided whom I wanted,' the *piaiman* replied, 'I acted quickly. And if the husband in question were not agreeable, I had him removed.'

"I smiled at his boasting. I had heard enough about the Surinam to know that the Dutch Government doesn't stand for any nonsense. It is difficult to police the jungles, it is true, but the local authorities have always done a surprisingly good job, and no medicine man could kill a jealous husband and expect to get away with it, let alone brag about it.

"'Don't make me laugh, Ventilius,' I said. 'You are a successful medicine man and a big fellow here among the Caribs of this district, but the Dutch Government is a great deal bigger, and neither you nor anyone else could succeed in such deeds as that. Why, the Dutch have been governing this colony for more than two hundred and fifty years! Long before the grandfather of your grandfather was born, there were large plantations back here in the jungle with great houses and statues brought from Europe and all sorts of beautiful things.'

"I was a little drunk, too, and suddenly I liked the sound of my own voice. There was something unfriendly about the house of

this *piaiman*. It made me want to talk and talk, as if to reassure myself.

" 'Yes,' he was agreeing, 'great plantations in the olden days and a rich life for the white man, as you say, before the grandfather of my grandfather; yet even today men go out one hour from the city to Paramaribo to hunt and sometimes they never come back. They are found months later, only their bones left after the ants are finished. What happened to them? No one ever knows. They are lost? They become confused in the bush and though so near to town, they cannot find their way? Perhaps! No, this country has always belonged to us, and it always will. The tiger still comes into the villages to kill our dogs and sometimes even our children. We still do the dances of the *Pakiras* and the *Tigers* and we always will!'

"As he finished this long dissertation we sat quietly for several minutes in the darkness. Then he began mumbling to himself:

" 'Tiger Dance! Tiger Dance! The man in the tiger!' and started to laugh in his strange, almost silent, fashion.

"I must have showed my distaste, for he leaned over and pushed my cup of whisky toward me with a suggestive gesture. His eyes assumed a beady glint. They seemed more wicked than they had been a minute ago, and ever more inscrutable.

" 'Have another drink,' he muttered. 'Drink well, while I entertain you with my story. There was a time once when I feared my powers as a medicine man were waning. I saw no outward evidence so far, but I fancied I heard murmurs in the village. And, besides, the townspeople had been plagued by a particularly vicious tiger, a master among tigers, whose stealthy attacks had considerably reduced the child population. I had been importuned to use my magic and rid them of this menace. I did not want to admit the inadequacy of my powers over a tiger. I was worried.

"Now, it so happened that a woman came to me that night

and asked for help. Her name was Sanu. She was ailing, or fancied that she was, and I gazed upon her as though for the first time. Her husband, Panu, was a hunter, and away upon a journey at the time. Suddenly I desired her, as I had never desired a woman of our village before. And at the same time I came to think that she must indeed be the answer to my ponderings. In some way, as yet obscure to me, Sanu was to solve my problems. So I no longer worried. Instead, until her spouse returned, I waited and I kept her with me.

“By the time her husband came back to the village, the whole tribe was restless, stirring, demanding action against the tiger. This was my last chance to regain my prestige. Boldly I called Panu to me. I offered him drink. At first he refused, perhaps suspecting poison, having heard the village gossip, but I soothed him.

““Panu,” I said, “you are a good hunter, and you have a beautiful wife. I am a great medicine man, and I have no wife. I shall strike a bargain with you. If you will do as I instruct you, you shall have your wife again. I, Ventilius, have spoken!”

“Then I waited. A fearsome silence filled the room. Panu looked about him wildly. Undoubtedly he wished to escape, but hesitated to make the break. Undoubtedly he knew of his wife’s stay away from his home. Undoubtedly he would have liked to kill me, but did not dare. Without speaking I thrust another drink into his trembling hand. He must do as I told him or I was a ruined *piaiman*. I willed him to obey. After a long time, I spoke again:

““This is what you are to do, Panu. You know of the tiger we have all been seeking to kill. Well, I shall admit to you that my magic is not strong enough to entice him, so *you* are to be the tiger. I shall produce him on the night of the full moon. The tribe will believe my magic has fetched him. And in return for

this favor, I shall, I promise you, never again molest your wife."

"Panu's eyes narrowed. He almost sneered at me. "And what good to have wife if me dead?" he demanded. "Tribe it see me like tiger, it shoot. I die!"

"You are wise, Panu," I flattered him, "but not so wise as your medicine man. I have thought it all out, and you will be safe. Here is my plan. You will dress in my tiger skin, and go to the Rock of the Three Forks—you know where I mean. There you will crouch on all fours in full view. When the moon is on high I shall lead the tribe to see that my magic has drawn the hated tiger. But evil spirits are abroad on nights of full moon. So I shall not let the people kill. I myself shall approach quietly, and with my machete I shall strike you down. In reality it will be but a feint on my part. You must crumble to the earth as though dead. Then I shall proclaim you slain, and when the tribespeople crowd about I shall hold them off, saying what is indeed true, that they must let the soul of the tiger depart in the moonbeams, else will they be cursed with it. At the dawn they may return for the carcass. By then the poisonous spirits will have departed forever. You see, Panu, how simple it all is, and you have nothing to fear. By dawn you will be safely tucked away in your own hammock with your wife, who will be yours again. I am an honorable man. Panu knows that!"

"Panu grunted his assent, and I knew that victory was already won.

"The eve of the full moon came, and I gathered the elders of the village about me in front of the council fire. I told them that my magic had warned me and that I myself would lead them to the Rock of the Three Forks, where the tiger would be found. Never again need they fear for their children. Twenty of the tribe were to accompany me, but only I was to close in for the kill.

When they questioned this I explained that my magic would fortify me and protect me from the evil spirits which would be freed from its body, but that they would be vulnerable and so they must keep a safe distance.

"At the hour of the full moon we approached the Rocks, a stealthy band of Indians who had slunk quietly through the jungle. There, outlined against the bright sky, crouched the giant beast. The elders drew back in silent amazement. I motioned to them to remain where they stood, and started forward cautiously. I took twice the time necessary to reach my prey. I was dripping with nervous perspiration; there must be no slip. My job must be complete and convincing. Finally, with a sudden lunge I swung my machete and with a single twist disemboweled the unsuspecting Panu. As he died he let out one cry, a *human* scream. Instantly the elders rushed forward. "That was no tiger," they shouted. "That was a man!"

"In a flash I realized this might work out to my advantage even better. With a quick movement I flicked the tiger head off the skull of my victim and exclaimed: "Why, the traitor! It's Panu!" In the stunned silence that followed, I continued, "He must have overheard our plans at the Council Fire tonight and has stolen out before us. Perhaps he has slain the tiger that my magic called forth this night; but now because of some fancied injury, to revenge himself on me, he thought to make my magic ridiculous. But alas, what a fool, for it is he who has paid the price!"

"Well, monsieur, you see I am still the great medicine man! If the elders that night doubted my magic they kept it to themselves, for they feared me more than they feared my magic; and never since then has my prestige suffered. In fact, even my enemies looked upon me with greater respect after I had so cannily

prophesied the exact spot where the tiger would be found. And the living tiger, monsieur,' Ventilius added, lowering his voice, 'he was never seen again. But that is where the element of true magic comes in. I must have been born under a lucky star.'

"Ventilius then took another good swig of his whisky and settled back in his reed chair with the air of being the smartest man alive. His expression was one of insufferable smugness.

"And so, Monsieur Smeeth, I said to him: 'Ventilius, you old reprobate, you don't act or talk like an Indian.' I guess by then *I* was a little drunk too. But never had I heard an Indian make such a confession.

"I shall tell you an even more wonderful story,' Ventilius went on. 'I am a white man.'

"*You* a white man!" I repeated his words in amazement as I gave him a withering look. Now I knew he was drunk. 'Don't be absurd, Ventilius. What are you talking about? You've just finished telling me you're a great *piaiman*, and medicine men aren't white men.'

"That is where you are wrong. Here is one that is. You live over the border in French Guiana? Yes? Then you must have been to Kourou?"

"You mean the district of Kourou between Cayenne and St. Laurent? I have,' I admitted cautiously.

"I am the direct descendant of the lone survivor . . ."

"I didn't know there were survivors," I interrupted him. 'I thought they were wiped out to the last man.'

"To the last *man* they were," Ventilius continued, 'but my ancestor was a girl child. In my veins flows the same blood as that of the noble French duke who was given the grant of Kourou from the King of France.'

"How do you know?" I asked him bluntly.

"It is tradition, carefully guarded, that has been passed down from generation to generation in my family. It is indisputable," Ventilius asserted proudly.

"You see, immediately after the epidemic of fever had swept through the colony, Indians came in to loot. They found much to loot, and yet their prize discovery was a tiny baby, crying in hunger. A baby who dwelt in the house of the leader. She was arrayed as a princess, a girl child of great beauty, and about her throat hung a golden chain, beaded with pearls, attached to which was a golden locket with the noble crest of her house engraved deep upon it. These Indians carried her off and she was adopted by the tribe. As the years passed she developed into a beautiful maiden and married the son of the Chief. I am the direct descendant of that union! And that is why when you say I think more like a white man than an Indian, you speak truly."

"Ventilius ceased talking and poured himself another cup of liquor. He gulped it in one big swallow, and without ceremony or comment, his head fell forward on his chest and he was asleep.

"And there is your story, Monsieur Smeeth," said my host as he refilled my glass of Perrier.

"Well, there's one thing I don't quite understand," I protested, "How would a medicine man living back there in the jungles of Dutch Guiana know about dukes and kings?"

"Oh, that is quite simple," M. Giraudau explained. "That Carib Indian district was only a short distance up river from Paramaribo. Ventilius had been subjected to several years' schooling in the town and he frequently entertained Dutch traders and balata overseers and gold prospectors like me who passed his way. Though he was a medicine man he was more than just clever. He employed the almost unbeatable combination of jungle lore and civilized ways."

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# 18

## THE MAN WHO WANTED TO WRECK AMERICA

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IT RAINED all afternoon and it was useless to think of trying to make photographs in that downpour. There was nothing to do but to take a nap and I had accordingly been sleeping soundly for perhaps two hours.

I awoke, yawned and stretched. What an enervating climate! Even the pit-pat of the raindrops on the drain pipes outside my window seemed to say, "Sleep on!" But then the piano demon went to work. The inhabitants of Cayenne call him Tschaikovsky Junior. Every afternoon at four o'clock he attacks the baby grand in his house across the street from the Hôtel des Palmistes, and half Cayenne hears his efforts. Never has Tschaikovsky been played with such vigor and abandon. The keys moan, groan, and scream in protest at the beating they take, but like a hobgoblin riding on the wings of the storm he continues in his fury until the last page of the score has been finished.

There came a blessed silence, until I heard the voice of the town crier bawling from beneath my window. It was like a commercial announcement following a symphony hour.

"Tonight at seven o'clock!" he was bawling. "The spectacle of the century!"

I stuck my head out of the window. I hailed him just as he was about to move on down the street.

"Bouliche, just what is this spectacle of the century?" I de-

manded. "Did a ship come in today from Martinique or from France, with some new film?"

He turned and looked up at me, smiling, the happiest *libéré* in Cayenne, his white hair almost hidden by his old tweed cap, the collar of his tieless white shirt flapping loosely around his thin neck. We were old friends. I had met him several days before, when Loren was photographing street vultures.

"But, no, Monsieur Smeeth," he answered cheerfully. "There has been no ship from France these many months and it is not yet time for the *Antinus* to arrive from Fort-de-France."

"Well, then," I admonished him, "what kind of a humbug is this you're putting over on the good citizens of Cayenne?"

"It is a picture they have seen before," he admitted without a moment's hesitation. "Indeed, this is the fourth time we have shown it. And if a ship does not come soon, I will probably have to keep on announcing it for another four times."

"Will it always be a spectacle, Bouliche?" I asked.

"Most certainly, monsieur," the *libéré* answered smoothly. "With me, they are all spectacles, or else they are not worth mentioning." He shrugged eloquent shoulders. "And as I never attend the cinema I can never be disappointed."

"But perhaps at times you are curious to see?" I persisted.

"Most certainly not!" he cried. "I get so tired yelling about them that my interest in them is quenched from the first. But—one must eat!"

Again the town crier shrugged his shoulders, and shuffled off. I watched him for a moment, squishing through the rain and the red mud of the Cayenne street, until there came a tap at Loren's door, which was next to mine. He was downstairs, so I answered the knock.

There stood our hotel waiter, Marcel the Strong Man.

## THE MAN WHO WANTED TO WRECK AMERICA

He bowed ceremoniously. "Pardon, monsieur," he said, "but it is four o'clock, and if monsieur is ready I shall put on my shorts."

"Shorts?" I exclaimed, gaping at him. "Why should you put on shorts?"

I had completely forgotten any appointment that called for such apparel as that. But Marcel had not.

"Monsieur Tutell assured me, monsieur, that you would be ready at four," he persisted, polite but stubborn. "I am to make my stomach disappear. I am to lift you off the ground in a hand-kerchief, with my teeth."

"You are going to do what?" I gasped.

"Lift monsieur off the ground. With the strength of my teeth and my jaws. Nothing else. I shall not use my hands. Monsieur Tutell has promised that he will photograph me in the act, so that you may show the pictures in your American lecture tour."

All this astounding offer was volunteered by Marcel with the utmost calmness, accompanied by a smile which displayed his teeth, a very fine row indeed.

"But, Marcel," I protested, "I do not want to be lifted off the ground by your teeth! I weigh one hundred and seventy-one pounds. It isn't safe!"

I gazed at those two rows of gleaming white teeth with something of the feeling with which a cornered mouse must gaze at a cat. They were too perfect. They looked artificial. No store teeth could ever hold up your Uncle Nicol's shapely form.

"Have no fear, monsieur," Marcel said cheerfully, reading my thoughts. "Everything will come out perfectly."

"That's just the point," I muttered. "And when they come out I suppose you will drop the subject. Look here, Marcel, why are you so anxious to be photographed?"

"I am a *libéré* now," he replied. "I can leave Guiana as soon as I have the money. Perhaps, if your cinema of me is seen by the right people in the United States, I shall be offered a vaudeville tour or a Hollywood contract."

"I see," I said. "And I am to be the bait. . . . Would you mind telling me where you learned your act?"

"In France, where I was born. But I toured all of Europe. I was billed as Marcel the Baker."

"And how long ago was that?"

"Seven years."

"But you can't be more than twenty-six or twenty-seven now!" I hazarded.

"You are right, monsieur. I was but nineteen when I was sent here."

"What had you done?" I asked.

"I stole two hundred and eighty thousand francs for a lady friend. My earnings as a strong man were not sufficient to keep her in the manner in which she desired to be kept. When they caught me, she walked off and married a very weak man with millions." He sighed.

"I suppose you will never steal again?"

"Oh, no, monsieur!" cried Marcel. "I shall never steal again. If I should, it would be strictly for myself."

We were walking down the corridor as we conversed, and encountered Loren Tutell as he returned.

"I hear you've dated me up for a screen test," I remarked.

Loren grinned. "Yes," he said, "Marcel is so anxious to get to Hollywood I thought we might try him out."

"Yes, I see," I murmured. "Naturally, I'm a bit interested, since it seems that I am the one that is to play Drop-the-Handkerchief with him. Do you happen to know whether any of his teeth are loose?"

## THE MAN WHO WANTED TO WRECK AMERICA

"Don't ask me," chuckled my photographer. "I'm not his dentist. But we shall soon know. Let's get started while there is still some light."

Marcel was out of his clothes and into his shorts in some twenty seconds and immediately started to put on his act. He flexed his arm muscles, and they seemed adequate, but they weren't going to help me any. He stretched heavy rubber pulleys taut with apparent ease. These evidences of muscular strength were all very well, but they gave no proof that I could depend on (or from) his teeth. Somehow, I found myself thinking, as I watched him, of the Alice in Wonderland jingle—

"You are old," said the youth, "and your jaws are too weak  
For anything tougher than suet.

And of Father William's reply—

"In my youth," said his father, "I took to the law,  
And argued each case with my wife;  
And the muscular strength which it gave to my jaw  
Has lasted the rest of my life."

I hoped fervently that Marcel had had plenty of arguments with his mistress before he took to the law, or the law took to him.

Marcel's next exploit was to make good his promise to make his stomach disappear. Before our very eyes he simply sucked it back into his spinal column. I couldn't decide whether he folded it up under his diaphragm and held his breath, or whether he really wrapped it around his backbone. Anyway, it disappeared. Next he settled down to the business of folding his legs into each other, until they, too, vanished somewhere behind him. It was incredible to see. One was at once both fascinated and revolted.

There followed a slight intermission, caused by the visit of one of the feminine guests of the hotel to the single outdoor *cabinet*

boasted by the Hôtel des Palmistes. To reach it, she had crossed the court below our window. From the agonized shriek which burst from her just after she had closed the *cabinet* door behind her, we opined that she had just missed sitting down on a centipede. Centipedes in French Guiana are about eight inches long, and they can display more legs in motion than Marcel could ever conjure up, even with his rubberlike contortions.

When all had quieted down once more in the hinterland, I asked:

“Marcel, why were you billed as ‘Marcel the Baker’?”

“Oh, that was merely the professional name I was billed under, in vaudeville. Neither I nor my father was ever a baker. He died when I was only a few years old, and my mother married for a second time. I hated my stepfather. He was a drunkard and he beat me. But when I was six years old I was stolen by gypsies. I was very happy with them, and for the first time in my young life I was free. I ate, I worked, I hunted with them. That is when I had my first love, when I was thirteen. That also is when they broke me.”

“Broke you?” I echoed.

“They saw that I would be strong. Even then, I was strong for my age. They wanted to prepare me for vaudeville, for a contortionist act. They broke many bones in my body and reset them so that I would be able to do the things with my legs that other men cannot do. That is why I am so pliant.”

Again he flexed the muscles of his arms and dropped to the floor and rose again in the twinkling of an eye, almost as though his legs had bent outward like a flattened rubber wheel and had then sprung upward again.

“But of course,” he added pensively, “I am now a little out of practice. Here in Guiana the climate and the way of life are not the best for keeping in shape.”

## THE MAN WHO WANTED TO WRECK AMERICA

I was still thinking of my impending trip into thin air. I flinched.

"Oh, do not worry, monsieur, I beg you," said Marcel. "You I shall lift with ease. My teeth are invincible."

And with that he indicated that I should lie flat on the floor at his feet. Under my posterior he slipped a large man-sized handkerchief, bigger than Miss Lamour's biggest sarong, and, having knotted its corners together, proceeded to take the knot between his teeth and to lift my swaying tonnage off the floor. I hadn't felt so helpless since the stork brought me. There was one fleeting moment when I thought that Loren would never be able to control his camera, since he was laughing so idiotically, and that I should have to go through with this dreadful ordeal a second time. But the whirring of the camera reassured me. Marcel, in the meantime, not content with taxing his jawbones to the cracking point, groped for and found his rubber pulleys and started to stretch them with his two free hands. I dangled there, about three feet off the floor, and *he* couldn't talk, so I said:

"Come, come, Marcel, don't you think that's enough? Let me down. Easy, now! No headfirst stuff!"

Presently I was again spread out on the floor, unharmed.

I wonder if I ought to send a copy of that motion picture to the cinema at Cayenne? It would be a great help to my friend Bouliche, the town crier, if I did. Then he could go along the streets with perfect honesty in his shouts.

"Tonight, at seven o'clock! The spectacle of the century!"

That night Loren and I sat up to a later hour than usual, listening to Marcel's stories of his early life with the gypsies. As a result, we slept later than our customary rising time, but right after breakfast we started off. Loren was determined to retake several shots with which he wasn't completely satisfied, so I went

my own way. My general direction was north, toward the ocean, and as I passed through one of the dingier streets a wail echoed from an alley. It emanated from a very young black miss who was experiencing her morning ablutions in the family washtub, at the doorstep, and was most unhappy about it. Her surroundings were incredibly dirty, and she resented her anchorage to leeward of a smoking stove that intermittently backfired soot through the open door, a smoke barrage that made her bath a farce.

I went on to a small park, not far from the water's edge. It is a desolate spot, bleak and uninviting, its only regular visitors the ever-present vultures. On its antiquated and broken-down benches, brought there after having served their usefulness at the Savane, only three old men were sitting, *libérés* with nothing to do.

As I strolled toward them I was surprised to see that one of the three, an old fellow with only one leg, suddenly hoisted himself up on his crutches and swung hastily off, his one stump dangling uselessly. His departure was so precipitate that it seemed almost as if he had fled because of my approach.

The other two held their ground. They had meek, gentle faces. I promptly labeled them Timidity and Resignation, because when I asked their names they merely smiled vacantly and replied that they had been in the colony so long that they had forgotten. Resignation, whose tattered vest was held together by the joint efforts of multitudinous safety pins, was better dressed than his comrade. His dilapidated jacket had a green velvet collar. He had been in the colony for thirty-three years. Timidity had been there even longer, for almost thirty-five. He giggled nervously whenever I addressed him, so I soon directed all my questions at Resignation alone.

"What's the matter with your friend?" I asked. "The man on crutches—he hurried off as if he were afraid I would do him some harm."



Bouliche, the Town  
Crier



Marcel, minus stomach



The Author and the Witch Doctor



Bathing Beauty,  
Cayenne

Bauxite Ore at Moengo



MR. RESIGNATION AND  
MR. TIMIDITY

The Machinery That  
Wasn't Wrecked



## THE MAN WHO WANTED TO WRECK AMERICA

"Well, you *are* the American traveler, monsieur, are you not?" replied Resignation, as if that explained everything.

"Well, yes," I said, somewhat surprised that my identity was known to this pair of bench-warmers. I was sure I had never set eyes on them before. "But what's that got to do with it?"

Timidity slapped his thigh and cackled in a high-pitched voice. "Why, that's the reason why Bruno ran off!" he snickered. "He, he, he! Imagine Bruno talking to an American! Why, he's the man who wanted to wreck America!"

"The man who *what*?" I echoed, once more amazed, as I had so often been before, by the unpredictable answers of Red Guiana.

"Would you like to hear his story, monsieur?" Mr. Resignation chimed in. "My friend here sometimes finds it difficult to express his thoughts, but he will correct me if I mislead you. Is it not so, *mon vieux*?"

Mr. Timidity nodded his head in approval, and, cupping his hands, settled down to listen with a self-satisfied air.

"Well, sir, this man Bruno," began Resignation, clearing his throat, "he's an expert machinist, and always has been. A good many years ago, when there was that other war in Europe, he was mixed up in some sort of government trouble in France. He was suspected of having German connections. Then he came here, and for a long time he was as poor as the rest of us. But one day, back in 1937, he was seen talking with a German traveler who was staying at the Hôtel des Palmistes. I think his name was von Heidenstamm, or something like that."

"Heidenstamm!" I exclaimed. I couldn't believe my ears. Here was my old enemy, the Bush Master, cropping up in Cayenne years after I had denounced him as a Nazi agent in Dutch Guiana.

"I think that was the name," said Resignation, nodding. "Well, this Heidenstamm stayed at the hotel for a couple of weeks, drinking champagne and spending a lot of money, and I think Bruno

got a good part of it. At any rate, after Heidenstamm left, Bruno continued to live like a lord, and we all wondered why he didn't clear out, if he had as much money as he now seemed to have. But he just hung around and said he was in no hurry to leave. That was four years ago, but it was only the other day that we learned what really happened. You see, when Bruno had his trouble, he took the fever; and although his leg is gone and the stump has healed up, the fever keeps coming back. He talks. We know the rest of the story is true, so we guess his part of it is true, too. After all, when he was brought back here, his leg was gone. He didn't dream that."

"Now, hold on a minute," I interrupted. "You called him the man who wanted to wreck America. How could a *libéré* down here in Guiana ever think he could wreck America?"

"That's just it, monsieur," said Resignation. "This is exactly the place where it could be done. Right here in the Guianas. And a lot easier than you think. You know that just over the border, in Dutch Guiana, no more than fifty kilometers on the other side, is Moengo."

Moengo! Now I began to have a glimmering of what he was driving at. I knew that at Moengo is the largest single deposit of bauxite ore in the world. It is from bauxite that aluminum is made. The United States gets sixty per cent of its supplies of bauxite from Moengo. I already knew that twenty or more American ships are sent there each month, each ship bringing back about a thousand tons of the precious ore.

"You see?" said Resignation. "You sure need that bauxite for your airplanes. But did you ever hear of the freight ship, the *Goslar*? She was a German ship. She came to Paramaribo, the capital of Dutch Guiana, in the spring of 1940. That was before the Germans ran over Holland, of course. She anchored in mid-

## THE MAN WHO WANTED TO WRECK AMERICA

stream in the Surinam, directly across from the city, and there she stayed.

"Well, a short time after the *Goslar* arrived at Paramaribo there sailed up the Surinam a little sailboat, whose only occupants were two men and a woman. Their story was that they had been sailing from Germany to Rio, but had been blown far off their course, until at last they found themselves at the mouth of the Surinam. They were awful low on provisions and had just about run out of water. And they had no money, either. So, *mon Dieu*, the sympathetic Dutch, there in Paramaribo, took up a collection for them. They gave them five hundred guilders, to set them up in the fishing business, so that they could earn enough money to go on their way again. But, monsieur, it was noticed that they didn't fish! They sailed back down the Surinam, to its mouth, and there they were observed making maps and soundings of the river. And, most of all, they hung around the mouth of the Cottica River, the river that leads up to the bauxite mines at Moengo."

Resignation chuckled. "There was German efficiency for you!" he grinned. "They might have bought all the maps and charts they wanted, for a guilder each, in any shop in Paramaribo, if they had only known. Instead of wasting time making maps, they might just as well have been fishing, as they were supposed to do.

"But all this didn't come out until after Germany invaded Holland. The day they entered Holland, darned if the crew of the *Goslar* didn't scuttle their own ship. What they hoped to do, and what they had had orders to do, was to block up the channel of the Surinam, which leads to a second bauxite deposit, also controlled by the United States. The *Goslar*, however, settled on her side and missed closing the channel, though by only a few inches. Then the Dutch interned the crew and it all came out about the 'fishermen' in the sailboat.

"That sailboat hadn't crossed the Atlantic at all, under its own sail. It had been carried on the deck of the *Goslar* until the *Goslar* got close to the mouth of the Surinam. Then, in the darkness, it had been lowered, with the two men and the woman for crew. And this, sir, is where Bruno comes into the picture.

"He had had his orders, all along, to lie low and wait until he could hook up with these three. He was supposed to meet them somewhere off the coast, near the river mouth, and to sail up the river with them, as a member of their party. He left here in plenty of time. You see, being a *libéré*, nobody cared very much whether he decamped or not. So he provisioned a canoe and started off from here, traveling along the coast by day and sleeping ashore at night.

"One morning, while pushing his canoe off the rocks, he overbalanced himself and the canoe slipped off into deep water while he had only one foot in the boat. Before he could lift the other leg, a long swift shape darted up from beneath, it jaws snapped, and then it was gone. Doubtless he screamed, monsieur, but who was there to hear him, between sea and jungle? No one! Somehow he managed to remain in the canoe and to get it to the beach, although he then fainted away. The next thing he knew, he was lying in a grass hammock, and an Indian was caring for him. He has no idea how long he had been lying, bleeding, in his canoe, before the Indian found him. The Indian told him that for days he had been delirious with fever. His first thought was to send a message to the German agents whom he had expected to join; but when he offered to pay the Indian to act as a runner, the Indian refused. Then Bruno found that he had been robbed of all his money. Bruno figured that the Indian had helped himself to it, thinking himself entitled to it for saving Bruno's life. He was finally brought back here to Cayenne, and that was the end."

## THE MAN WHO WANTED TO WRECK AMERICA

"The end?" I exclaimed, as he looked at me smilingly, as if he expected a pat on the head. "What has all this got to do with wrecking America?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu, mon Dieu*, thirty-three years in this country and my mind is beginning to wander!" ejaculated the gentle old fellow. "Of course I forgot to give you the whole point of the story, monsieur! What I meant to say was, these Germans in the sailboat were to carry him to Paramaribo, if he had met them as planned. From there, with the help of connections already assured for him, he was to be sent to a job waiting for him in the engineering plant of the big bauxite mines at Moengo. He was, as I have told you, an expert machinist. And while the *Goslar* was bottling up the Surinam, and the bauxite shipments by way of that river, and the fishing trio were to block the mouth of the Cottica River, which leads to Moengo, Bruno was to destroy the machinery of the plant itself, at Moengo."

"But how could one man alone throw a monkey wrench effectively into such an enormous plant?" I asked, incredulously.

The old *libéré* mused for a moment. "I do not know enough about such matters to say," he replied at last. "But from all I can learn, even slight sabotage might completely disrupt the whole operation of the mining machinery. It might shut the whole plant down for weeks or months, before replacements parts could be obtained and installed. That would be the least Bruno could hope for. With luck—who knows?—he might have succeeded in blowing up the whole plant. If the *Goslar* had blocked the Surinam channel, and the others had blocked the Cottica, Bruno would have truly wrecked American airplane production to a serious degree. Do you not agree, monsieur?"

I wasn't prepared to agree with him at that moment, but, a month later, when I visited both Paramaribo and the giant bauxite

holdings of the Aluminum Company of America at Moengo, I gathered ample support for old Resignation's story. Everybody in Paramaribo knew the story of the German sailboat and the three spies. And, at Moengo, trustworthy employees who showed me through the plant told me that they were working at capacity schedule, and that the slightest mishap to any of the machinery would mean incalculable delay. I have no reason to doubt the story given me by the *libérés* in Cayenne, and, it is hardly necessary to add, it was heartening to hear, at the end of November, that American troops had been sent to aid in guarding Dutch Guiana, supplementing the Dutch.

But at that moment all this was in the unknown future, and all that I could think of was the figure of the man on crutches, a sinister figure as I saw it now, hurrying to get away before an American could wish him a pleasant good-morning.

"How does it happen that Bruno is still here in Cayenne?" I asked the two shabby old men on the bench.

Resignation shrugged his shoulders. "Where else can he go?" he asked gently. "Germany has a way of forgetting her men when they are no longer of any use to her."

"Yes," said Timidity, with a funny little jerk to his head, "Bruno is back where he was in the beginning. Only now he has only one leg."

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# 19

## THE GOLDEN BELLS

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FOR seven long years I had looked forward to visiting *Ilet la Mère*. Now, as the launch carried us steadily closer to that speck of land, my eagerness mounted with each added minute.

I knew that the woman who had once ruled over its sea-encircled acres was no longer there. I knew that to all intents and purposes she had vanished from the face of the earth. I knew that I should now find on Mother Islet no human beings except the black citizen of Cayenne who had leased it, his wife, and their one servant, a white ex-convict; I knew that none of these three had the slightest knowledge concerning that mysterious woman whom I had once known—the French woman who had made *Ilet la Mère* the scene of the most poignant human drama, the most pitiful and the most glorious, that I have ever heard from the lips of an actual participant.

No, the three present inhabitants of the islet would know nothing about her or her story. I resolved to ask them nothing, for it would be useless, but merely to gaze at the bit of ground where she had once touched the heights of human joy and the depths of human suffering. It would be time to tell that story of hers after I had left the island. . . .

From the point where the river enters the Atlantic, after flowing past the town of Cayenne, the coast line of French Guiana trends southward. East of the river mouth and some four miles

distant from the coast is the tiny island known as *La Mère*, the Mother.

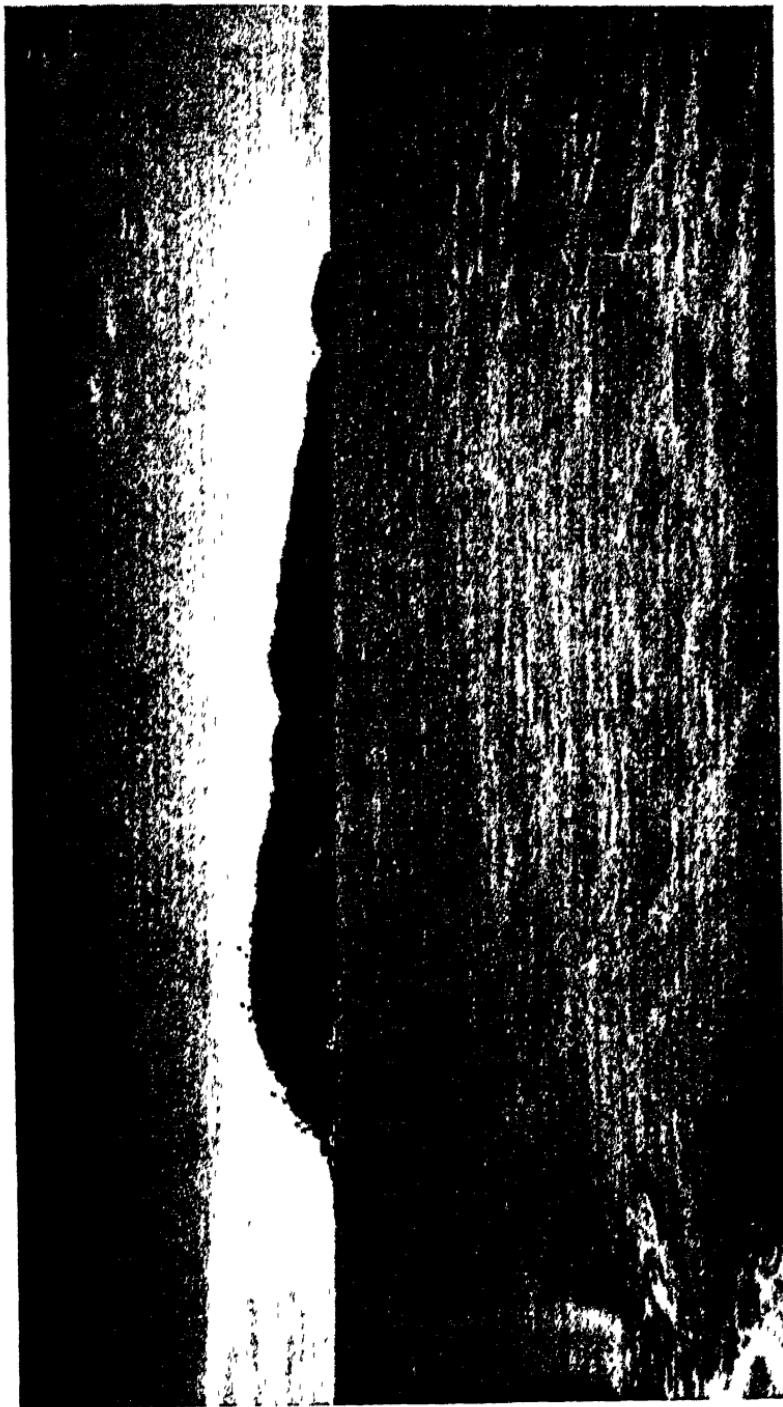
It is one of a group of four very small islands, the Father, the Mother, and the Babes. They are virtually uninhabited and, of course, can be reached only by boat.

Knowing of my eagerness to visit *La Mère*, the Governor of French Guiana generously offered to take me and my companion, Loren Tutell, to the islet in his launch, *L'Audacieuse*. His aide, Captain Richard, accompanied him.

The distance from the spot where *L'Audacieuse* had lain at moorings in the river at Cayenne to the island was about ten miles, and the voyage occupied about an hour and a half. As we came up close to the island we saw that it was about a quarter of a mile in width and little more than that in length, with an area of not more than twenty or thirty acres. From its western end, which scarcely rose above sea level, it sloped upward gradually to the other end, where the elevation reached some three hundred feet. The whole islet was heavily wooded. Magnificent trees, mangoes, breadfruit and cocoanut palms grew in abundance. The only house on the island was so concealed by a grove of breadfruit trees that we did not catch sight of it until we landed.

The island tenant, the dark-skinned Cayennais, came down to the rickety little pier to meet us, accompanied at a respectful distance by the French *libéré*, his servant, a sulky-looking fellow who, we learned, had served time for murder. Governor Chot decided to while away the time in fishing from the Negro's rowboat; Captain Richard struck off into the woods to hunt iguana, the giant lizards; and Loren and I started off on a stroll, with the murderer acting as our guide.

He was not at all reluctant to tell his story. He had been a factory worker in France, had had an altercation with a German,



*"La Madre"*—“The Mother”—The Island Made Sacred by MADAME DUVEZ.



Our guide, the ex-convict, pointed to the mainland, four miles distant



The Tower of the Golden Bells, built by the Jesuit Missionaries

and had killed the man. His fellow workers had pleaded for leniency to him, and, instead of being sentenced to death, he had been sent off to Guiana, and had just finished his seven-year term. He was immensely proud of having killed a German.

Passing the house, he led us along a path skirting the edge of a low bank which dropped off to the sea. The branches of the giant trees met overhead, tall ferns walled us in on both sides, and the dense foliage and the tangled vines festooning every branch combined to shut out almost every vestige of sunlight. We walked in semi-darkness. The ground beneath our feet was wet and spongy. The *libéré* told us that there were many wells and springs on the island, and an abundance of drinking water. We had proceeded little more than a few hundred feet into this shadowy tunnel of vegetation when we emerged upon a small clearing, where a little sun filtered through. The contrasting lights and shadows were superb, and the stillness so profound that we could readily have believed that no living person had ever been here before us. But in the center of the clearing was a tower.

The tower was very old, that was immediately evident. The bricks of which it was built were thickly covered with green moss. The gaping window, high above ground, suggested the architecture of the seventeenth century. It struck me that this ruined tower must be more than two hundred years old, perhaps nearer three hundred.

"What is this relic?" I exclaimed.

"The Tower of the Golden Bells," answered our murderer guide. His voice was solemn, a note of awe in his tone.

"Golden bells!" The words leaped out, incredulously. "Surely you don't mean there are golden bells in that ruined tower, now?"

Loren did not seem so much impressed by the discovery of an ancient edifice in this out-of-the-way spot as I was. He went on

down the trail, by himself. But I stepped forward eagerly and began to examine the tower from all sides. On its far side there was an arched doorway, which I entered. Part of the wall was gone, but even with this additional opening the light of day scarcely penetrated into the small, gloomy chamber in which I found myself. The inner walls exuded a clammy sweat, and the heavy air carried the reek of rotting vegetation. Only some fragments of worm-eaten timber lay upon the earthen floor: all that was left, I suppose, of a ladder or stairway that had extended to the belfry.

My guide had not followed me into the dismal chamber. "There aren't any bells in here," I called to him, "golden, or any other kind!"

My voice sounded strange, echoing hollowly within the walls of the ancient ruin.

I hurried out of the place. There had been no one there in the shadowy twilight of the cell, of course; and yet I had *felt* as if someone were there. . . . It was good to see someone living, even if it was only an ex-murderer. . . .

"No," said the *libéré* softly, watching me with a strange smile lurking on his face, "the golden bells are no longer here—at least, *not in the tower*."

He pronounced the last words in a whisper charged with meaning. "But they might be very near," he added, a crafty look in his eyes. "That is why I stay on this wretched island for the few miserable francs the Cayennais pays me."

I was convinced, now, that the fellow was not wholly in his right mind. I wondered how far away the Governor was, with this man's black master, and where Captain Richard was. But I could hear Loren thrashing around in the forest, not so far away, and took comfort.

I sat down on a log which had fallen near the doorway of the tower. The ex-convict seated himself beside me.

"Who built this tower?" I asked.

"The Jesuits who came here from France nearly three hundred years ago," he answered, not looking at me but staring moodily at the ruined building. "They had a famous monastery here. This island, small as it is, was rich then, more than two hundred and fifty years ago. Rich, and cultivated. You can still see other remnants of their work—the brick foundations of their monastery, and the great stone basins they carved from stone, where they watered their animals." He motioned toward the beach. "Look over there. There are the basins."

Now that he was pointing directly at them, I could see the huge circular troughs of stone, though they were so nearly covered with undergrowth that I would have otherwise passed them by. The jungle had closed in around them until they were almost completely buried in the lush tropical verdure.

"Yes, the Jesuits were rich when they came to Guiana," he went on. "They had picked a virgin field in the land they called El Dorado, the Golden; mysterious and unexplored, then, most of it remains unexplored even today. They soon had a great hold upon the Indians they found here. The mysticism of the church and its ceremonies appealed to the natives and they quickly began to worship the God of the White Fathers. To show their piety, they presented the priests with nuggets of gold, which had been found in the streams, a great quantity of them. From the bronze church bells which the missionaries had brought with them, artisans made molds, the gold was melted, and two bells of purest gold were cast. Their tones, it is fabled, were like music of heaven. This tower, at which we are looking, was built as the belfry for them. But what happened to those golden bells before this island was at

last abandoned by the Jesuits is unknown. The people of Cayenne believe that the bells were taken to France. But that is only a legend. I know the truth. Only I know it. She's dead now—the old Indian woman who had the true story from her mother, who, in turn, had it from hers—she's dead, now, I say. She never told it to anyone else. She told it only to me."

"Why only to you?" I asked curiously.

"That is my business," snapped the convict. And then, more politely, "And you may also wonder why I now tell you the story. That also is *my* business. What I choose to do, I do. After tonight, it won't matter, anyway. My year on this island will not have been in vain."

"What did the old woman tell you?" I prompted.

"She told me," he said deliberately, "that at the time the golden bells were stolen from the priests—yes, that's right, they were stolen, and no mistake—her great-great-grandmother was living in a hut near the beach, not far from old Fort Diamant, which is twelve kilometers from Cayenne, and about the same distance from this island, *La Mère*. That fort was built in 1662, you know, to defend the entrance to the Mahury River, a river that leads back into the Indian country. The walls of that fort, or what is left of them, represent the oldest piece of construction by Europeans in all French Guiana.

"One night during the rainy season, this Indian girl, Christina, was startled by a scream that came from somewhere near her hut. She was wide awake at the time, because the roll of the thunder had kept her from sleep. Her husband was away on a hunting trip. The scream chilled her blood. Scarcely daring to move, she listened. Muffled cries, hoarse breathing, the scuffling of men locked in fierce struggle, came to her ears. Men were fighting, not a dozen paces from her door.

"Alone as she was, she was thoroughly frightened. Ought she escape, while she could? Ought she stay where she was? Quickly she snuffed out the candle glimmering by her hammock, and the hut was plunged in darkness. She felt safer, then, and even a little bolder. She decided to venture out, to see what was happening.

"Slipping without a sound into the blackness, she had taken only a few steps forward when she felt wet sand beneath her bare feet. She had reached the edge of the jungle which surrounded her hut, and had come to the strip of white sand fringing the Atlantic. Just then a gleam of lightning flickered across all the sky, and she repressed a cry of horror. The sudden flash outlined the naked figures of four men, leaping toward one another in a murderous struggle.

"She sank to her knees, screened from them by a clump of grass. The lightning continued to run across the sky, and she could see them plainly. One was a white man, huge, bearded, naked to the waist. The other three were Indians, naked except for breech-clouts. They were slowly and watchfully circling around the giant white man, like wolves around a bear. Sweat glistened on their coppery skin in the flashes from the sky. She could hear their labored breathing as they warily faced one another, summoning their strength for a renewal of their struggle.

"She could not distinguish the faces of the combatants and terror squeezed at her heart. Was any of the Indians a friend of her husband's? Who the white man was, she could not guess. Her terrified glance wandered beyond the men, and lying on the beach was a fifth man, whose motionless body showed only too certainly that he had fallen in the fight. Beyond him, pulled up on the beach, was a small boat. The white man must have landed from the sea. But from where?

"Another flash of lightning lit up the scene. In its glare she

saw, close to the boat, two cone-shaped objects. They gleamed in the semi-darkness, reflecting from their smooth surface the light in the sky; and the Indian girl involuntarily crossed herself, for she recognized in them the two golden bells of Mother Island!

"She knew them well. Christina was a devout daughter of the Church. On many a holy feast day she and her husband had paddled in their corial to this very islet; she had seen them too often to be mistaken now. These were the bells of gold! But what were they doing on this desolate beach?

"The Indians closed in again upon the white man, leaping at him from three sides at once. A long knife gleamed in the hand of the foremost. Christina's eyes dilated in terror. But before the upraised knife could descend, the white man caught the Indian's wrist in a grip of steel, whirled him around and sent him crashing against the other two, so that all three staggered back. The white man had gained another moment of respite.

"Once again the implacable Indians leaped forward. Again the blue glare of lightning flamed across the sky. In its radiance, the kneeling girl caught sight of two more figures, hurrying toward the fighters. One wore the long robe of a priest. With a gasp, Christina recognized him as one of the Jesuit fathers, he who headed the monastery. The man following him was one of his Indian converts. Frantically Christina mumbled the names of all the saints, praying wildly that the White Father would end the dreadful battle before another man was slain.

"But he was too late. As he strode across the narrow beach, his robes dragging in the wet sands, one of the infuriated Indians slipped beneath the white man's guard and plunged the knife to his heart. The giant shuddered, threw his hands upward, as though stretching them in supplication to the god of the storm, and, as the thunder crashed, he fell dead.

"The priest reached his side, kneeled beside him, studied the face of the dead man for a long moment. Then, rising, he motioned to his attendant to lift the golden bells into the boat. During all this, the three Indians stood motionless, their heads bent humbly. As the priest turned toward them the three knelt at his feet. Christina, crouching in her hiding place, strained her ears to catch his every word.

"'You have done well, my children,' she heard him say gently. 'This wicked man stole the property of God; and it is God himself, not you, who has punished him. The golden bells have been recovered, but they have been defiled. They must be put out of reach of the greed of man. They shall be buried on the Island, and in the belfry tower we will hang bells of bronze in their stead. No longer will we permit our island to be the envy of such as these.'

"His sandal tip touched the body of the thief.

"'May God's will be done!' chanted the kneeling Indians.

"Christina rose quietly and glided back to her hut. Once safe inside, she fastened her door with a heavy wooden bar, then relit her candle. But she carried the candle straightway to the wall on which was hung the picture of the Mother of God and placed it on the shelf below, so that the light streamed upon it.

"All this is what she told to none but her own blood, and no other ever heard the tale until *I* heard it. The golden bells were brought back to this island that very night, and they have never left it, from that day to this!"

His voice rose shrill and triumphant as he ended his tale with this confident assertion, and his eyes gleamed with a feverish brightness. His eyes fixed mine challengingly, as if daring me to doubt his story. Fantastic as it was, difficult as it might be to believe that the Jesuits abandoned the island without taking the treasured bells with them, yet, by the very intensity of his own be-

lief, he had succeeded in peopling this deserted glade with living shapes. In spite of myself, I could not control the feeling that within the shadows of the tower others, besides myself, were listening.

"Yes, monsieur," the excited man repeated, lowering his voice to a whisper, "the bells were brought back here and buried here! Just where, I have not yet been able to discover, but they are on the island! And before the moon rises tonight they will be mine!"

His glittering eyes glowed with an insane light.

"How can you be so sure?" I asked reluctantly.

"Because I have seen him!" His reply was impatient. "He knows where they are hidden, and he will lead me to them."

"He?"

"The thief, of course! Who else? The white man the Indians killed. He has looked a long, long time for them. . . . Yes, the priests were clever, but not clever enough. You see, he works from below. . . ."

A faint, unpleasant smile parted his lips, a crafty smile.

"The point is, he has not yet had time to take them away," he whispered, eying me cunningly. "It was not until last night that he found them. I saw him as he passed by my window. For the first time, he was smiling. I know what he was thinking. He was thinking that now he will taste all the good things of life . . . rich food, soft women, wine—and clean sheets! I am sorry for him, but I am afraid he must be disappointed a second time. I shall be stronger than he, do you understand? I am never the one who is killed—I am he who kills. You understand, do you not?"

I nodded my head in vigorous assent as I backed away from him. But my face must have betrayed me. The murderer favored me with a look of scornful pity.

I hurried on around the corner of the ruined tower, and drew

a breath of relief. Loren was standing there, only a few yards away. He had taken a picture of the tower and was just gathering up his camera equipment.

"Oh, hello there," he remarked as I hurried up to him. "I think this one will be a beauty. But it's a funny thing, Nicol, I had the goofiest feeling while I was timing the exposure—I kept thinking someone was watching me. Where were *you*?"

"Back in the seventeenth century," I answered, mopping the sweat from my forehead. My hand was shaking.

As we retraced our steps, heading for the ramshackle landing stage at which the Governor and his aide were now awaiting us, I lingered to take a last look at the unimposing house which had been my sole reason for this visit to *Ilet la Mère*. I had not come there to hear tales of ghosts, or of buried treasure, nor even to gaze at the crumbling relics of the Jesuit occupancy of the island. I had come for no other reason than to see for myself the house within whose walls a strong man ate his heart in bitterness for ten long years.

That was the house of Madame Duez.



PART III

MADAME DUEZ

THE author of this book originally outlined the story of Madame Duez in an article entitled "Strange Love Tragedy of the Rich Widow of Devil's Isle," which appeared in the *Saturday Home Magazine* of April 18, 1936. The copyright in that article and all motion picture rights connected with the story of Edmond Duez and his wife are owned by Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc. This full account is here printed with their permission. All rights in this extended version are protected by the copyright of this book.

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# 20

## M'SIEU PERRONNET'S DAUGHTER

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ON THE occasion of my first visit to Cayenne, which was in 1934, and during the weeks of my stay at the Hôtel des Palmistes at that time, I came to feel very much at home. The guests, I among them, took their meals in the dining room next to the bar, but from my table I could see that the patron and his wife had their own table set in the passageway at the end of the court. The handsome woman with white hair who invariably took her meals with the patron and patronne was, I supposed, a member of the family.

Watching her, I was struck by the inexpressible sadness of her eyes. One could not help feeling that a terrible tragedy had overshadowed her life, marking her patrician face with lines that made it impossible to judge her age. She wore her outmoded dresses with a dignity that is only the privilege of the grande dame; she had a friendly smile for her companions, and she had evidently won the devotion of the family monkey, a nasty-tempered little beast who ran away screaming at the approach of any stranger. At last my curiosity got the better of me and I asked the patron who she was. He was quite shocked at my ignorance, and told me most impressively that the lady in question was his most important guest, none other than Mme. Edmond Duez.

At the time, this information conveyed nothing to me. But as the days passed I finally met her; and her gracious manner encouraged me to seek her out for frequent talks. It was not long before she was coming up to my little sitting room to spend an

hour now and then in talking of her past life. It had been, as I had guessed, a tragic one, and she seemed to find relief in confiding to a sympathetic stranger the story of the events which had forced her to know long years of bitter loneliness and which at last, after a gleam of happiness, had struck the cruellest blow of all. Bit by bit she recreated for me the moving drama whose opening scene had found her as a young woman radiant with happiness and whose final curtain was now drawing near.

\* \* \*

*The curtain rose in Paris, in that year when Mademoiselle Isabelle Perronet, hardly twenty, daughter of a prosperous citizen of Orléans, became the bride of Edmond Duez, a Parisian lawyer, forty-two years old, in the prime of life.*

*And in an evening not so long after their marriage—*

THE HUM of voices increased. The stately drawing rooms had become so crowded with men and women that the liveried men servants carrying huge silver trays of refreshments could scarcely make their way from room to room.

An elegant young man, probably a member of the Embassy of some foreign state, moved slowly through the crush, his eyes roving here and there, alert to light upon any woman sufficiently attractive to warrant his closer attention.

A hand twitched his sleeve. He turned, to be confronted by the amused countenance of a youngster of his own age, equally elegant, who had backed himself against the wall to avoid the swirl of arriving and departing guests, while he munched a *pâté*.

“Always hopeful, eh?” whispered this second young man, grinning. “Give it up, my boy—I’ve already looked the field over. I assure you, there isn’t a woman here worth looking at twice. Have a cigarette?”





*Portrait by Charles, Orleans, France*

**MADAME DUEZ**

Before her marriage to Edmond Duez

The newcomer accepted it ruefully. "I suppose I'll have to take your word for it," he drawled. "You know your Paris, of course. But this is the first time I've had a card to one of these Presidential functions. You disappoint me. I had a notion that when the President of France gives a reception it's bound to bring out the most dazzling women you have to offer."

The other shrugged. "That's true enough, sometimes," he admitted. "But not invariably. This one happens to be for the old folks. The President has invited all his Cabinet ministers and their wives. Catch him inviting any mistresses to the same party!"

The searcher's eyes continued to rove hungrily over the groups slowly forming and reforming as they drifted in and out of the salon in which stood the Cabinet guests.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed suddenly, grasping his friend's elbow in his excitement. "Look! Over there! Who is *she*?"

His companion languidly directed his gaze in the direction indicated.

"Oh, my dear fellow!" he expostulated, in a tone of gentle rebuke. "Surely you do not consider *her* beautiful!"

The woman to whom his attention had been drawn was young, certainly not more than twenty-five. They saw her in profile, for her face was turned in the direction of a small group of gentlemen who stood not far from her. She was young, but not slender. There was an appearance of heaviness about her, of strength, and solidity, rather than of youthful grace.

"Surely," whispered the exquisite to his friend, mockingly, "you do not go in for the peasant type, do you?"

But the young Embassy attaché continued to gaze at the woman, deaf to the vicomte's raillery.

"Who is she?" he repeated.

"If you must know," laughed the gilded youth, "that is old M'sieu Doorstep's daughter."

“Doorstep?”

“Yes, old Perronnet’s daughter. The nickname is a wretched pun, I admit. *I didn’t invent it.*”

“And this Perronnet, this doorstep—who is he?”

“Of the bourgeoisie. A shopkeeper, a manufacturer, I don’t know what. Of Orléans, I believe. When he retired from business—comfortably well off, I imagine—he established a residence here in Paris, to introduce his daughters to the marriage market. He knocked at the doors of society, so to speak, but nobody seemed to hear him, for a long time. It was then that they began calling him M’sieu Doorstep. Poor old fellow, he was a little pathetic.”

“Well, but he seems to have succeeded in the end, more or less—here is his daughter among the guests at the Palais de l’Elysée.”

“Oh, well——” the vicomte shrugged. “As I told you, you can’t call this particular soiree ‘Society’ with a capital *S*. This one’s political, mind you. She wouldn’t be here, otherwise, in all probability.”

The Embassy attaché lifted his monocle once more and stared at the young woman with renewed interest.

“Don’t tell me she’s a power in politics!” he ejaculated.

“Oh, dear, dear, no!” lisped the vicomte. “Do you think that if she were she would be standing there as she is, a wallflower, and with not a soul except yourself, my dear boy, to give her so much as a passing glance? An intellectual? Not on your life! I’ll wager you anything you like that as long as she remained in Orléans she never learned anything except from Mama and Papa, and that to this day she doesn’t know one political party from another. No, no, she wouldn’t be here at all, except for her husband.”

“Ah, she is married! And to whom?”

The frail nobleman giggled.

“To the stupidest man in all Paris,” he said solemnly.

His questioner stared. "You mean that she——" he began incredulously.

The vicomte's slender hand waved the unexpressed suggestion away with finality.

"Oh, *mon Dieu*, no!" he exclaimed, with an earnestness which, in him, amounted to violence. "She hasn't even the intelligence to be unfaithful to him. She adores him, stupid as he is. They are mated music. Their name should be Duet, instead of Duez."

"Duez!" repeated the other. "So that is her husband's name, Duez? Certainly not a name of distinction. I don't recall having heard it. And you say he is a politician? Is he here? Which is he?"

The vicomte bestowed a pitying smile upon his questioner. "You ask the most unnecessary questions, my dear fellow," he drawled. "In order to know where M'sieu Duez is, it is only necessary to look at Madame Duez. Do you not see? She points in his direction like a compass."

The attaché obeyed. As the vicomte had cruelly observed, young Madame Duez, "Old Doorstep's daughter," stood alone and unnoticed, solitary in the midst of the groups who laughed and chattered all around her. But if all were oblivious of her, so, equally, was she oblivious of all others. No expression of mortification, of consciousness that she was being ignored, was in her eyes. On the contrary, she stood proudly, her chin lifted high, her eyes shining happily, a faint smile of pride curving her lips, like the smile of a young mother who watches her infant son.

"But she is magnificent, vicomte!" whispered the young attaché. "Her face has a radiance upon it, truly, as if a light from heaven were shining down upon it! Upon my word, it would frighten me if a woman looked at me like that!"

"You see him, do you not?" returned the other, in an equally low voice.

The embassy youth shifted his gaze to follow that of Madame Duez. It came to rest upon the knot of men, distinguished in appearance, who were conversing among themselves, withdrawn to a little distance from the general buzz of conversation.

"He is one of that group, of course," said the attaché confidently. "But which one? I do not know all of them. There is the President, of course. And I recognize Millerand. The one talking so animatedly is Bunau-Varilla, is it not—the man who insists that a canal must be built across Panama? But which one is Duez, the husband?"

The beardless vicomte put his lips close to his companion's ear. "The one with the beard," he whispered.

"My God!" exclaimed the attaché. "And *that's* what she worships?"

The man thus identified as Duez was of powerful stature. He was not the only bearded man in the group, for Paris was enjoying a vogue of beards. But his was pre-eminent among the others in that assembly. Dark and luxuriant as the beard of an Assyrian emperor, it flowed downward halfway to his portly stomach. Its wearer was impressive, faintly pompous. His forehead was broad, rather than high, an Olympian forehead. Large of nose and high of cheekbone, it was curious that his massive brows were almost lacking in eyebrow. A flowing mustache, joining with his beard, almost concealed his full, sensuous lips. His somewhat small eyes gave no indication of any sense of humor. He seemed to be listening to what his companions were saying, gravely, but without venturing an opinion of his own.

"So that's Duez?" continued the young attaché. "An impressive-looking individual, I must say! Looks like Rhadamanthus judging the dead. Why do you say he's the stupidest man in France? It hardly seems as if the President would share that opinion with you. And look at Millerand—he's put his arm around

Monsieur Duez' shoulders, as if they were boon companions!"

The vicomte wrinkled his nose in delicate disgust. "And what of that, pray?" he inquired. "Did you never before observe a clever man flattering a dull one? I tell you Duez is so grossly stupid that he ought not to be allowed on the streets without a guardian! If I were his wife—which God forbid!—I would letter the words 'I Am Blind' on a square of cardboard and make him carry it around his neck when he goes out of doors. But, there, what is the use of expecting any such help from her? She is as blind as he is! To her, Duez is the only man in the world. Man, did I say? She thinks him a god! What a precious pair of babes in the wood!"

And he struck a match for his cigarette with such unnecessary violence that it broke in two in the middle.

"You say he is a politician?" inquired the attaché. "He hasn't the appearance of a politician, to me. He's my idea of a college professor, rather. Tell me, what makes you think him dull-witted? Pompous, if you will. But surely not stupid!"

The vicomte sighed. "I will explain to you, my friend," he said, "because you are *étranger*. But all France knows this. Regard this: This Monsieur Duez is headed for disaster just as surely as the sun tomorrow will rise in the east. Me, I say this. It is inevitable."

"Disaster?"

"Of a certainty! How could it be otherwise? Has he not accepted appointment as the liquidator?"

"Liquidator? Liquidator of what?"

"*Ciel!* Is it possible that you do not know? When all France talks of nothing else?"

"Bear with me. Remember, I am newly arrived. I know nothing."

The young nobleman sighed again. But he was patient. "I

will explain it as to a child," he said. "When I speak of the business of the liquidations I am speaking of the business of winding up the property holdings of the Holy Church in France. You knew that, didn't you? That the Government, only a year or two ago, finally succeeded in decreeing that Church property, all of it, to the very last acre, must come under the control of the State? Yes! You think that is not worth a pretty penny? My friend, nobody knows how many billions of francs the Church holdings are worth this day! One billion, two billions—who knows?

"Whatever the amount, it is a sum to stagger the imagination. All the property—churches, schools, colleges, monasteries, convents, the vineyards, the wine presses, even the shrines along the roads—all this is to be inventoried, ticketed, appraised. True, the law does not decree that all this must be sold for cash, down to the last item, and the gold poured into the coffers of the State. Oh, no! Those who wish to band together to form religious congregations, subject to the laws of the State, may continue to enjoy the use of the properties held until now by their sect. But the liquidation proceeds, nevertheless. It is a task as enormous as liquidating the affairs of an empire. It is a task which rests upon the handling of money—millions upon millions of francs. And what happens, my friend, when politicians' noses sniff the smell of money? I need not tell you!

"Yes! . . . Well, then, do you suppose that when this infamous law was passed—I speak as a loyal son of the Church—the politicians did not immediately begin to lick their lips and to put their brains to work? What do *you* think?

"But one must give the Devil his due. Men who are greedy are not always, by the same token, stupid. A liquidator was to be appointed, under the law, to take charge of these colossal receipts. You are not so simple as to suppose that any politician rushed for-

ward to apply for that job? Never! Not they! They were too old, these birds, to put their claws into any such tempting lime. They know only too well that sooner or later there would be the Devil to pay, and the man who must pay would be the simpleton in direct charge of the accounts. . . .

"Not a man of them would accept the job. I know for a fact that it was offered to one man after another. They fell over themselves, trying to get away from it!

"And so at last, in desperation, it was tendered to this fellow Duez. Duez! And who was he? A nobody! A very capable, hard-working, unimaginative, slow and plodding lawyer, with a head for adding up columns of figures. They offered him the position of liquidator, and, upon my word, I don't see how they managed to keep their faces straight while they did so.

"Of course he accepted. He didn't know any more about politics than that Gobelin tapestry over there on the wall. They patted him on the back, and offered him a fee that was about ten times as large as any amount he had ever earned in a single year. He's been at work on the thing for months. He's conscientious, works a dozen hours a day, they tell me. That's why his eyes are so tired.

"When they have got all they want out of him, they will throw him out. Remember what I tell you. You shall see what a prophet I am. Yes, when he has served their purpose to the full, he'll be tossed aside like an old pair of gloves. When that day comes, he may consider himself lucky if they simply discard him without any fuss. The best that can happen to him will be to escape charges of criminal mishandling of these enormous funds. It is almost inevitable that they will be made. That post of his is loaded with dynamite. Anybody would know that. Everybody does know it. But not this Duez. He walks right into it, simply beaming with

happiness. Now, are you satisfied? Is there anyone in all France to equal him for stupidity?"

The young attaché, gazing at Duez as the bearded big fellow stood humbly listening to his distinguished benefactors, shook his head dubiously. Then he glanced at madame, the wife of Duez, and his face lightened.

"I'm not so sure he is stupid," he answered slowly. "Just look at her! I can't even agree with your estimate of her appearance. You seem to think she looks like a peasant woman. To me, she might well be Marianne—France's Marianne, the embodiment of France. And you say she comes from Orléans? Well, wasn't there another young woman of Orléans who personified all the glory and courage of France? The Maid! Say what you will, this woman is unconquerable!"

"Come, come, my friend!" laughed the vicomte. "Now you are permitting yourself to be sentimentally romantic! In another moment you will be telling me that Madame Duez, and not this bewhiskered husband of hers, is the one who wears the trousers. No, no, it is simply not in the cards!"

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# 21

## ON THE HONOR OF A GENTLEMAN

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A LAW affecting the holding of property by religious organizations not answerable to the civil government was decreed by France in 1901. Indirectly, its passage tragically affected the lives of two persons with whom the law was not concerned in the least—Edmond Duez, a lawyer, and his young wife.

The law was interpreted as calling for the liquidation of all church properties. A number of "liquidators" were appointed to carry out this work. To Edmond Duez, appointed among the first, were assigned various responsibilities, the two most important being the liquidation of properties belonging to the Marianist Fathers, which included the College Stanislas and its buildings in the Boulevard Menilmontant and those owned by the Rédemptoristes. Judgment in the case of the Rédemptoristes was rendered by the Tribunal of the Seine on August 8, 1904; in the Stanislas case December 8, 1904.

The law (as later amended) provided that ownership of any piece of church property might be transferred by the congregation by sale to any "civilian society" properly constituted under the new law, the membership of such a society to be identical (in practice) with the membership of the congregation. The real estate in these two cases was thus sold by the congregation to a civilian society organized for the purpose, the amount paid being 9,500,000 francs. This transaction was superintended by Edmond Duez, and this immense sum of money was placed in his keeping.

Another and even more important task was then assigned to Duez—the liquidation of the properties belonging to the parochial schools of the Christian Brothers. This Society owned more than two thousand pieces of property, scattered all over France, in every Department, together with school locations in Algeria and the island of Corsica. It was a task of staggering size. Duez rented an entire building, a small one, at No. 17 rue Bonaparte, a centrally located little street on the left bank of the Seine. He converted its upper floors into an apartment for himself and his wife and established his offices on its three lower floors. A steel wall-safe was installed in his private office.

Subsequently defending the expense of carrying on his work, Duez pointed out that he had had to set up "a veritable Ministry." More than 2,500 *dossiers* (the separate folders containing all the assembled facts bearing on the liquidation of each separate piece of property) were to be handled. "Rents were very high," he pleaded, "and the equipment for the offices" which had to be established all over France—"furniture, lighting fixtures, telephones, filing cabinets, and so on"—was an enormous item. An examination of each of the two thousand and more pieces of property had to be made on the spot, wherever it might be; and since the time was limited—the liquidator was required to prepare a schedule of the assets and liabilities of each of the congregations, and this within six months from the date of his appointment—traveling expenses made another huge expenditure necessary. Duez, who had been obliged to hire forty assistants, as well as "numerous clerks," estimated the cost of liquidating these two thousand church establishments at five hundred francs each, including the traveling expenses and lodging—a total of one million francs for liquidating this one Society. . . .

Edmond Duez worked night and day at this titanic task. If he had not been a man of powerful physique, he would surely have



*Portrait by Fontès, Paris*

MADAME DUEZ

Before the Trial of Her Husband, 1909



*Photographed by the Author, 1934*

MADAME DUEZ

After Twenty-five Tragic Years

*From L'Illustration, Paris, 1910*

EDMOND DUEZ, IN HIS OFFICE AS LIQUIDATOR; THE WALL-SAFE IN THE BOOKCASE, RIGHT



cracked beneath the burden. His wife, unable to fathom the ins and outs of the whole complicated problem, could only watch with anxiety while he drove himself on, and try, as best she could, to protect him from a nervous breakdown. Brought up like many another Frenchwoman in the belief that a good wife does not meddle in her husband's business preoccupations, she asked no questions regarding his work. She knew only that by some happy miracle her husband was now able to pour money into her lap, and that the whole enchanted world of Paris was opening up to her in a way she had never before dared to dream. Duez thrust into her delighted hands tens of thousands of francs for the beautification of their home and for the purchase of the famous creations which were the pride of the *grands couturiers*. If he looked pale and worried, she attributed his haggard looks to the long hours his task demanded of him, and, patting his cheek, begged him to rest.

But it was not alone the long hours of poring over dizzying columns of figures which was responsible for the increasing anxiety of Edmond Duez. Already overburdened and harassed, as he was, by his task, he was beginning to be troubled by doubts. . . . Doubts as to the good faith of the powerful political personages who had put him where he was. . . .

He confided none of these doubts to Madame Duez. Hiding them, he continued to tell himself that "everything will come out all right, in the end. Only have patience!" But there was no time to worry about that now—the countless duties of his office pressed upon him so sharply that he could not spare a moment to reflect upon his own fears.

Wearily, Edmond Duez went back to his heaped-up desk, kept his eyes fixed upon the immediate problems. Not the least of them was the ominous muttering of resentment on the part of all good church people against the fixing of the seals.

The Government, headed by Combes, a savage enemy of the

priesthood, began in 1902 to interpret the law passed in 1901 as giving it authority to break up nearly all the church congregations in France, suppress their schools, seize and sell their property. Actually, the chief intent of that law was to assure to the people of France the right to form free associations for worship, none of which were to receive special privileges from the civil government. (The governmental appropriation for public worship gave to the Catholic Church for the year 1905 revenues of 42,324,933 francs, this in addition to the sums given directly to the Church by its own parishioners.) But the Combes ministry proceeded to action, prompted by the assumption that the dispersal of the Catholic congregations was legalized. It ordered official seals to be affixed to the doors of all church buildings, in token that the Government was now in possession of the premises. The hapless liquidators, of whom Edmond Duez was one, were then to inventory the properties and prepare them for sale.

A wave of bitter resentment toward this highhanded procedure swept through France. Alexandre Millerand, although he represented the Socialist party, the extreme left wing of the Republican party in France, fought the Combes ministry fiercely in the Chamber of Deputies because of this fanatical anti-clericalism. But, although he was chiefly responsible for its eventual defeat, the Combes ministry did not fall until January, 1905. In the meantime, Duez, who had been appointed to his office during the Combes regime, went ahead with the work.

Duez afterward complained that he, racking his brains to find ways and means to carry out his duties, was confronted with the necessity of finding money with which to silence the opposition to the expenditures for affixing the seals; money to forestall attempts to break the seals; money to employ watchmen to guard against the breaking of the seals; money to set aside to cover legal costs of

demanding the sale of certain pieces of church property, or in fending the right to make such sales; and no such funds had b provided, nor even had the co-operation of the regular administrative bureaus been promised, by the Government. Almost at wits' end, he once cried:

"After having succeeded—how, I hardly know!—in work out ways by which all these impossible duties could be perform after having paid out some very heavy sums for the legitim reasons above mentioned, I was suddenly confronted by an ala ing prospect, one which I had not dared mention even to mys I had been deluding myself with the hope that it would not necessary to pay out any *more* money—yet here the desper necessity faced me!"

Long afterward, in summing up the whole story, Duez decla that the primary reason for the troubles in which the liquidat found themselves (for he was only one of several) was the apa and the negligence of the Government in the very beginning.

"Before they had even so much as decided to name the li dators," he insisted, "the Cabinet ministers, in conjunction w the proper governmental departmental heads, should have loo at least a little into the practical procedure adaptable to this fi of operation, paying special attention to what its cost would They should have calculated the disbursements and the reven from the Church properties, and should have provided for considerable expenses necessary in carrying out these operati

"There should have been a survey of the various governme bureaus—the Land Registry offices, and so on—in order to upon, above all things, a dependable method for liquidating properties of the congregations. But no! Even the retention a special staff, although admittedly necessary and useful, ' bitterly attacked by their families, friends, and henchmen.

staff badly needed, and yet regarded as a whim of the worst sort!"

I found these words in a manuscript which Madame Duez herself entrusted to me into which she had copied her husband's own version of his acts. It seemed to me, as I read it, that Duez unconsciously painted his own portrait in the words which he next utters—the portrait of a man so deeply absorbed in his effort to do his job as it should be done, conscientiously, that he could see nothing else. Obsessed with the notion that he ought to find out all he could about the job confronting him, he blundered into a mine of information. He was overjoyed. Had he been less trusting, he might have seen in this bit of "good fortune" the beginning of his tragic entanglement.

This is what happened, as he describes it:

One of his intimate friends is a member of the Chamber of Deputies, a man named Rabier. Rabier is Deputy from Orléans. Madame Duez is of Orléans. (Perhaps it was through Rabier that Duez first met his future bride. . . .)

At all events, Rabier, knowing how anxious Duez is to inform himself about the Church holdings so that he can do his job better, gives Duez a friendly tip. The Chamber is debating the bill to provide for the establishment of the associations authorized to receive the Church properties. Rabier is attorney for Sieur Bourdonneau, treasurer of the religious order known as the Oblate Fathers. "We have some confidential papers you might like to have a look at, Duez," says Rabier genially, over an after-dinner cigar in Duez' apartments. "Drop in at my office, if you like. But, remember, they are confidential. Not a word of this in public!"

Duez gives his word, the word of a man of honor. . . .

"Thanks to the co-operation of Rabier, Deputy from Orléans," writes Duez, "I was able to gain access to all the papers, enabling me to make a preliminary survey of the work to be done, thus permitting the stage to be set; for these *dossiers* included a list of all

church properties, by congregations; the amount of interest to be expected from mortgages on church property; and even the names of those liquidators whom the congregations X, Y, and Z would regard as satisfactory to them!"

In the midst of his rejoicing, he is sobered by the sudden remembrance that he is not at liberty to make use of this wealth of information. He has given his word of honor: "I shall guard it as secret, and I shall not make use of it officially."

The poor fellow rubs his head, perplexed. What is he to do? Is there anybody whose advice he might ask? Why, yes, Millerand! Millerand is the leader of a party that is certain to come back into power. Duez is a humble adherent of that party. Millerand is as crafty a statesman as there is in France. Why, yes, he's exactly the man to go to! Duez hurries to him.

Millerand, who is no older in years than Duez but certainly far shrewder, hears his story in silence. "I am not at liberty even to impart it to my colleagues, the other liquidators!" Duez winds up, mournfully.

Millerand chews his cigar and eyes Duez thoughtfully. "Doesn't it occur to you," he asks, "that you can make this information serve your personal needs?"

Duez flushes. "No," he says firmly. "I have given my word. I cannot do even that!"

Millerand shrugs his shoulders. He turns back to his desk.

"In that case," he observes carelessly, "I wish you good afternoon, m'sieu."

The interview is over.

But Duez cannot bear to let the matter drop. He is a man of one idea. This is what he says:

"In spite of this self-imposed veto upon the use of this priceless information, unable to ignore that which I had learned, I wanted to do the impossible—I was determined to spread upon the official

record the very words of my information. To that end, I knocked at the doors of the various departments of government—the Land Registry offices, the Finance Department, the Bureau of Mortgage Loans, the division dealing with religious sects—all, in short, which were mentioned in the documents I had seen. But I found, for all my trouble, only that all these doors were closed to me!"

And still he persists! He does not know where to stop, this Duez. One fears that Duez is by way of becoming a nuisance. . . .

"Through the columns of *Le Matin*, the powerful newspaper controlled by M. Bunau-Varilla, I sought vainly to make these doors open to me. With what result? Buloz, Attorney-General, summons me peremptorily to his office and threatens me! And Bunau-Varilla, having learned that for some reason or other his brother-in-law, Lecouturier, another of the liquidators, has been similarly warned by Buloz, decides to let the whole business drop. But—the doors do not open!"

Thus discouraged from the outset, perplexed and made uneasy in his mind by the strange attitude of men in high place, he set about his task to the best of his ability.

Here, at the very start, Duez came to the crossroads. He was faced with the necessity of choosing between two courses of action. He chose the wrong one.

Another man, of different character, faced with the same dilemma, would have offered his resignation. But Duez could not contemplate such a surrender. Whatever his true reason, whether it was because he could not bear to give up the lucrative fees he had been promised—he expected to receive 100,000 francs for the Christian Brothers transaction alone—or whether it was because his sense of duty blinded him to all else, he made his decision:

The big fellows, the Cabinet ministers, would not help him? Very well, then, in order to get the job done, he would do what

they, by their very silence, commanded him to do! He would use the same unsavory tool that "everybody else" used, and always had used in French politics—the bribery of the little fellows, the greedy ratlike little fellows, without whose consent nothing could be done!

Duez' written statement, written twenty years later, is the cry of agony:

"In spite of this lack of co-operation on the part of the Government, I went ahead with the business of administering the properties assigned to my office. For better or for worse, the work was set up—at the cost of much trouble and money. *Because, since the business could be put through only by gaining the consent of lobbyists and underlings, it was necessary to grease many a palm. . . .*"

To himself, he justified this wretched course on the ground of expediency. Like many another before him, he seems never to have considered the giver of bribes as being equally guilty with the receiver. . . .

"It was necessary!" From how many others, through the centuries, has that cry been wrung!

The pressure upon him continued without cessation. Those who sought to gain entrance to him and to dip their fingers in the enormous funds with whose guardianship he was entrusted were legion; and for them all he had a secret loathing and contempt. "In the course of the liquidations," he writes bitterly, "cabinet ministers, senators, deputies, counsellors both national and municipal, notaries, attorneys, lawyers, throwing obstacles in my way by busily pulling wires in both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, were at first against the church congregations; then, later, came secretly to my private office, to wheedle me or to threaten me to favor the establishments, at the very moment that some of these congregations were tightening their lines.

"In order to gain the delays they wanted, the Church congre-

gations, the politicians, even the Cabinet ministers, did not scruple to employ the services of women, more or less highly placed, to meddle in the business.

"Actual blackmail was attempted! The Viscountess de V——, and various newspapers, the tools of Combes [the Prime Minister who had set on foot the program against the Church] tried to get their hands on the money, on the claim that they could furnish me with private tips on the actual financial value of the various church holdings, or for other equally imaginary rights and services to which they pretended. I knew positively that it was the Viscountess who supplied one of these newspapers with the material for its blackmailing attempt. But the Government subsequently ordered me to leave these three women, the Viscountess, Madame P——, and Madame C——, out of the picture. I was not to name them. . . ."

(One wonders what Madame Duez knew, if, indeed, she knew anything at all, concerning the intrigues of these women in high social position. Did she consider them as friends, or was she miserably and secretly jealous of them? I never questioned her. She never spoke of them.)

Duez stubbornly went on with his work as liquidator. His offices, in the year 1904, had not been supplied by the Government with the funds necessary for carrying on operations on the great scale demanded of them. The wages of his staff of forty assistants and of the small army of clerks were being paid in a hand-to-mouth way, and no provision for other legitimate expenses had been made. New expenses, equally heavy, loomed up in the immediate future. Thoroughly alarmed, Duez now sought out the leaders of the political party responsible for the whole enterprise, to spread the situation before them. In this group, Millerand was supreme.

As Duez describes it, in the account transcribed by his wife, the party leaders to whom he appealed met his plea with callous

indifference and made a counter proposal which staggered him.

They told him in effect, he writes, that there was no money available at the moment. Instead they calmly suggested, he asserts, that he himself should advance the necessary sums until further revenues were available.

Duez stared at them in astonishment. "I?" he exclaimed. "Why, I have no such fortune as that! I am not so rich that I can advance the several hundred thousand francs that are needed! Why, gentlemen, it is quite likely that the amount needed, if we run into litigation, will reach a million francs! I cannot possibly advance any such sum!"

The spokesman leaned forward. "I'm afraid you do not quite take my meaning, Monsieur Duez," he smiled. "What we mean is——"

Duez alleges that he was then told that he must bear in mind the fact that it would undoubtedly take a number of years to complete the liquidation of the church properties; that he was to consider himself safe in his post until that work was finished; and that therefore, "in one way and another," from the cash coming into his office from the church properties, either in the form of rents and interest payments or from the sale of the fixed assets, he could reimburse himself!

"Have no fear," he was told. "We will back you up in everything, and you will be protected in every way. But we beg of you thus to dedicate yourself to the Party cause. It is for the good of all!"

Duez adds a cryptic remark: "I was made to understand—and Millerand among the rest so instructed me—that my office cash box must be at the disposal of *the business entrusted to me*, and that in the interests of the Party I ought . . . And so on and so on. . . .

"I understood. I agreed."

This secret meeting came to an end, says Duez, after those present had asked him to pledge his word of honor that, no matter what happened, he would never reveal anything.

Duez asserts that he pledged them his word.

"Accordingly, then," he continues, "I acted as paymaster in everything, including the dispersal of several hundred thousands of francs as 'fees' to lawyers, witnesses, and so on. . . . And at the same time I postponed any demand for the fees already due *me*."

"To meet my various office expenses, I was obliged to advance *more than five hundred thousand francs*."

When I came to this assertion, in the account of the affair which Duez himself had written and which Madame Duez had opened to me, its very simplicity astounded me. It was as though someone, speaking in a most matter-of-fact manner, without raising his voice in the least, had said: "Why, yes, that is what I did."

Duez was incredible.

"In the meantime," Duez went on, "doing all I could do, in common decency, to face all these payments and to carry on with the liquidations, I had come to the end of my strength. And then the Stanislas College case suddenly changed the whole picture."

This was the settlement, successfully negotiated by Duez after protracted discussions, by which a sale of the college property was effected. The sale placed in his hands nine and a half million francs, although, to avoid further legal delays, he had been obliged to pay out to the bankers forty thousand francs, and to the lawyers one hundred thousand francs. "But thanks to this operation," he records, "my treasury again found itself with funds to continue."

Unfortunately, the easing up of the strain was only temporary. After the year of the Stanislas case, 1904, and the overthrow of the Combes ministry in January, 1905, by Millerand, and the conse-

quent increase of Millerand's political power, Duez struggled through four years of unremitting anxiety. "Lawsuits over the liquidations and enormous expenses followed one another, the fees of the lawyers multiplied, I was pulled along into deeper and deeper waters, and, during all this outlay of funds, not one man of those who had promised to help me even lifted a finger."

Early in 1909, Duez feverishly went over his office accounts once more. As he stared at the remorseless figures he realized with a sinking heart that for a second time he had come to the end of his rope. He was tired of having been made a sacrifice again and again. He decided to go to the Government and insist upon being reimbursed for the advances he had made.

It was a fatal decision, for him.

The President of the Tribunal, to whom Duez presented the figures, looked at the staggering sum which Duez claimed was due him, and pursed his lips. He summoned the Solicitor-General and the Attorney-General into conference—all three shook their heads gloomily over the figures. It looked like a bad business. "There is something fishy about all this, Duez," they said. "We shall have to ask for your resignation as liquidator, while we look into it. It needn't become public—just say you are offering it because of poor health. But you must resign."

The world of Edmond Duez had collapsed around his ears. The date was March 17, 1909. Stunned, he went home to his wife, and told her that everything would be all right. She was not to worry in the least. . . .

Edmond Duez was fully aware that an investigation such as had been ordered in his case must terminate in a formal court trial. In cases of this sort, where wrongdoing was suspected but evidence had not yet been gathered, French law provided that a thorough investigation be made by an examining magistrate,

privately, before any public charges were made. He was therefore given plenty of time and opportunity to produce evidence of his innocence.

Maître Albanel, the magistrate assigned to conduct this preliminary investigation, knew Duez and Madame Duez well. He was the dean of the *juges d'instruction* of the *Tribunal Civil de la Seine*, the court which held its sessions in the Palais de Justice, the ancient building which stood in the shadow of the cathedral of Nôtre Dame, a few minutes' walk from Duez' apartments in the rue Bonaparte. Duez was not required to give up his apartments, nor were the offices which he had conducted in the same building moved elsewhere; although another liquidator, Jacques Pellegrin, was now placed in charge of the office.

Duez retained lawyers—Maurice Bernard, Bonin, and Yung. He had some idea of appealing to the high court of the Senate. But word came to him constantly, through his lawyers, to drop any such idea.

Duez remained on the most friendly terms with Albanel, the magistrate. "Albanel was always very pleasant with the representatives of the Land Registry Bureau assigned to the investigation, with my lawyers, and with me. We lunched, we drank, had tea together, and so on. But on one occasion, annoyed by this general gaiety, I wound up by exclaiming, 'But you are amusing yourselves by playing cup-and-ball with my head!' To which Albanel replied, 'Come, come, Duez, you haven't got anything to worry about—a little prison, and you'll be rid of the whole business! Don't give it a moment's concern!'

"Maurice Bernard dropped in one day and told me: 'Last night' (or perhaps he said 'yesterday afternoon,' I can't remember) 'I worked very hard for you; I must tell you what I have achieved.'

"Nevertheless, in spite of my repeated questions, I don't know to this day what it was that he did for me. . . ."

The weeks followed one upon another. Briand was chosen Premier. Millerand, whom Duez came to regard as his arch-enemy, became Minister of Public Works in Briand's first Cabinet, in July.

For a while, hope flared up in Duez: surely his friend, Millerand, would come to his rescue!

But as week followed week, and no word of encouragement came, the bewildered Duez began to realize that help might never come. Again and again he thought grimly of that secret meeting in which he had been told to "go ahead, and all will be well—for we will support you." Again and again he was at the point of shouting out that it was not he who was guilty, it was the higher-ups; but each time, with a groan, he recalled that he had pledged his honor as a gentleman never to reveal anything.

"I gave my word," he told himself. "To violate it is unthinkable. It is I who must shoulder the blame, and I alone."

"Are not others implicated with you in this?" asked Maître Albanel, persuasively.

"No one."

Duez' own lawyers tried to make him involve others.

"Surely the real responsibility lies elsewhere," Maurice Bernard whispered. "Tell us, so that we may show that you acted merely upon orders."

"I have nothing to say," repeated Duez stubbornly.

Duez wrote, years later: "Through all this I was silent.

"Friends as well as enemies came to believe and to tell me (yes, the assertion was made to me repeatedly, both then and afterward) that my defense was idiotic," Duez eventually recorded. "They told me that it should have been left to the lawyers and to the *juge d'instruction*, the experts, who never ceased to say to me: 'Let yourself be led!' But I remained silent.

"For I had pledged my word."

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# 22

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## TWELVE YEARS OF SILENCE

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THE year 1910 began for the Parisians with the torrential rains which made the Seine overflow its banks and flood a great area of the city. In that excitement, people forgot their recent topic of conversation, the arrest and subsequent trial of Mme. Steinheil. When the floods had subsided, there was a brand-new sensation for all: the production, in February, of Rostand's fantasy, *Chantecler*, with Guitry and Simone in the leading roles. It is quite possible that Monsieur and Madame Edmond Duez attended the opening performance of that spectacular drama, for all the brilliant world of Paris was there, that night; and Edmond Duez could still meet all eyes boldly.

But on Tuesday, March 8, 1910, the investigation of his books having been completed, Edmond Duez was suddenly arrested. The arrest took place at his own apartments, No. 17 rue Bonaparte. He embraced his wife and was taken to a cell in the grim Palais de Justice. Seals were placed upon the doors of his offices in the same building, pending the removal of such papers as would be introduced at the trial.

The newspaper headlines announced that "not less than five million francs" had disappeared from the assets of his office.

Forty-eight hours after the arrest of Duez and the removal of the seals from his house, a search having revealed no incriminating papers, Beaufils, acting Prosecuting Attorney for the Republic, to whom had been assigned the prosecution of the case, came to see Duez in his cell. Duez and he were friends. They had once seen

each other daily. Duez had found jobs in the past for several of his protégés in the big department stores of Paris—the Bon Marché, the Printemps, and the Samaritaine.

"As soon as he entered my cell he took both my hands, and said: 'See here, Duez, where are the *secret* documents?'

"That was all he could think of! That was all anybody could think of. Secret documents! The fact is, there *were* no secret documents."

The trial, in the Court of the Assizes, dragged along over eight months. Duez remained silent to the end.

The court pronounced sentence on the twelfth of November. Duez was found guilty, and condemned to twelve years' imprisonment.

Guyot de Saigne, a Senator of France, while on the floor of the Senate, heard the news of Duez' conviction. He turned pale, clutched at his side, and fell stone dead in front of the tribune of the Senate.

Duez had never named him.

Was it the shock of relief, the realization that his name had not been brought into the scandal, that killed Guyot de Saigne? Or was it the shock of terror? No investigation was ever made.

Duez' term of imprisonment dated from the day of his arrest, March 8, 1910. He and his wife deluded themselves with the belief that he would be set free on March 8, 1922.

Realization of the awful truth, the fact that a sentence of twelve years automatically implied banishment to the penal camps of French Guiana—any sentence of seven years and upward brought such exile—and that these twelve years would be followed by twelve more years as a *libéré*, without power to leave Guiana, sank in upon them slowly.

Almost before he knew what was happening, he had been torn

from the arms of his wife, had been thrust into the dark hold of the prison-ship, *La Martinière*, which at stated intervals carries its cargo of condemned souls to Cayenne, and had been hurried from Cayenne to Devil's Island.

As a "political" prisoner, he would be placed on that particular island, one of the three which form the group called the Islands of Salvation. From the physical point of view, imprisonment on this outwardly lovely little isle would remove him from contact with the common criminals sentenced to hard labor and to the crowded and the then unsanitary barracks on the mainland. He, a man of breeding and education, would be spared the loathsome herding with degenerate and degraded men. He would be spared the brutalities of the prison camps in the jungles. Though condemned to solitary confinement, he would at least escape the horror of those narrow, dark cells on St. Joseph, where the "incorrigibles," those who persisted in attempts to escape, were in those days shut away in living tombs. Although he would be permitted to speak to no other prisoner, or scarcely to the guard who brought him his food and water, he would be housed with at least a semblance of decency in a hut of his own, surrounded by palm trees, and with an uninterrupted view of the beauty of tropic seas. Why, with only a little imagination, one might describe it in the terms of a winter resort advertisement!

Devil's Island has no common barracks. Each of the handful of prisoners upon it—there has never been more than half a dozen at any one time—has his own hut, his own stockaded bit of ground where he may pace back and forth, and his own guards, men who are ever on the alert but who "do not intrude too offensively upon his privacy." That is one way of phrasing it. Yes, it is solitary confinement, with one mitigating aspect—the open air. It has all the other features which make mental punishment as tormenting to an intellectual as physical punishment may be to the toughened

criminal: complete isolation from his fellow creatures, silence. . . . Except for the keepers who supply him with his meager food, he is a man forgotten. The huts of the other prisoners are far apart, placed at different sites on the island; the guards are too zealous; there can be no communication. The endless days pass: tropic sunrise followed by tropic night, month after month, year upon year; "the rest is silence," save for the hammering of the surf and the cry of the birds.

Nothing to do but think, and think, and think. . . .

His mind did not give way, and in the course of time, after ten years had passed, he was brought back from the island to the mainland and was given some work to do within the penitentiary walls, by the commandant of the prison. In 1920, Duez wrote proudly:

"I have conducted myself in exemplary fashion. I have had, I can say this with a clear conscience, the full esteem of the prison authorities here. Whenever I had finished the draft of a written statement, the commandant of the penitentiary would say: 'It is you who has prepared this statement, Duez? In that case, I do not need to verify it.'

"One commandant, who had charge of the money matters for the whole penitentiary, said this: 'I have turned over the keys to the safe to Duez, without the least fear that it can result in anything but benefit to the prison staff.'

"Trusted? I was not watched at all! I never so much as saw a door key as I went about my tasks, day or night. I could go wherever I pleased, with no one to ask me where I was going or what I was going to do.

"I was entrusted with the prison correspondence, helped in prison organization, taught prison classes, and performed various other services."

Year after year, he had addressed to the French government an

appeal for release, but each appeal fell on deaf ears. He had already been chained to Devil's Island for four years when the first World War began; he remained chained to that solitude throughout the four years of the war; he was still there during the two years of peace conferences which followed. In the midst of these mighty events, is it any wonder that he was utterly forgotten?

But his transfer from the lonely island to the mainland penitentiary at Cayenne coincided with the elevation of his "friend," Millerand, to the highest office of France, the office of Prime Minister, on January 18, 1920. Duez summoned his hopes anew. Fresh pleas flowed from his pen. And the penal authorities in Cayenne, impressed by the man's unflaggingly good behavior, added their recommendation to his appeals.

Not the slightest notice was taken of them.

Finally, stung to desperation, Duez wrote down an impassioned statement reviewing the entire affair. It is this extraordinary document, bearing the date of July 20, 1920, which Madame Duez copied from her husband's papers and placed in my hands. It is a cry from the very soul of a man who had endured ten years of torture. He can no longer force himself to keep his oath of silence. In it, he names the men who, in his estimation, were the truly guilty ones.

"Why, in spite of the appeals renewed year after year, was I refused any reduction of my punishment? Two words give the answer: *Political vengeance!* Millerand had ordered that any proposal from me demanding a hearing must be passed by the Council of Ministers. Naturally enough, Millerand did not want that; and each man in the Cabinet chose to say Amen!

"On the day of my release they will be forced to render an accounting to themselves; and they will see that I have *not* 'put anything aside' but that I will have come home only to the shelter

of my modest roof and that I will be dependent upon the help of my relatives and my friends. What will they then give me as compensation? That is what I ask myself. Because, after all, I cannot submit to having been the victim of a supposition which was placed before the whole world by public accusation, a supposition, moreover, which has been shown to be without foundation in fact, without having the right to certain things in exchange. Even though it may not be a question of material compensation, I continue to hope that I shall at least be restored to the full and free citizenship which would have been mine if I had not been denied the benefit of the extenuating circumstances. . . .

"This, then, is the prospect which lies before me—a living hell. A hell not merely for myself, at the age of sixty-five, but also for my luckless wife. For ten years our only hope has been to rejoin each other, and at long last to take up our life. Sad and painful as our existence must be, at least we shall be *together!*"

There is a pause here, in the faded manuscript, as though his voice had faltered. He steadies himself and goes on:

"Whether this plea brings favorable results or not, I must make plain the predicament in which I shall find myself on March 8, 1922, the day when I shall be set free:

"From the day of my conviction to the day I write this, a space of nearly ten years, I have lived in a dream world of anticipations and of hopes. To me, this did not have more than the importance one would usually attach to such fancies; but to my poor wife it gave the supreme consolation, unfailing hope.

"Today, as the day of liberation draws near—there remain, as you read these lines, twenty months for me to serve—I tell myself that in view of the length of time it takes for the Government to reach a decision I must make use of this remaining time. I must think, I must reflect, I must try to hit upon some practical plan

of life; because, on the eighth of March, 1922, from the minute when I am set free, I shall have to shift for myself. I shall have to earn my own living, and I will be sixty-four years old. . . .

"That will not be easy, here in this colony of Guiana, where the prison officials always say to a convict as he comes to the end of his term—and, make no mistake, they know what they are talking about—'It is now that your penal servitude really begins!'

"That isn't a particularly pleasant thing to hear, especially at the age of sixty-four. . . .

"Upon what may I count? Ought I, at whatever cost, make my plans on the theory that I am to be allowed to return to France? Or must I look forward to an unending exile in Guiana?

"If I am to be allowed to return to France, at what exact date will that be? Because, after all, since I shall have to make an actual living, day after day, I must know what to decide, I must know the date, at least approximately, on which I may return.

"I cannot live in perpetual uncertainty as to what I am to do, for my resources will not permit it. Moreover, that would be a bad way in which to live honestly.

"If I must count on nothing, if the unyielding and the merciless are to be my sole portion, then let there be the frankness to tell me so; in that case, even if I am to be maddened by this new injustice, I shall at least be facing a certitude.

"In the latter case, I should send for my wife and plunge her, as I shall plunge myself, into the swamps of Guiana; we shall live as best we can, as day laborers; at least we shall be together. . . . Since the country has a murderous climate, we shall not last long . . . and I do not know anyone who would not rejoice at such an end to all uncertainty. It would be far better than to have the sword of Damocles forever suspended over one. . . .

"Oh, if only I might see France once more, for there I should

long for nothing except to be buried there! But here, in Guiana, where I have already been condemned to death, that thought is unbearable. . . .”

And, nearly five years later, a despairing footnote, scribbled on the margin:

“We have now reached the 16th of December, 1924, and the settlement of my case, begun on March 8, 1910, is still not brought to an end!

‘Fifteen years, and it is still unfinished!’

It is *still* unfinished.

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# 23

## "THE END OF MY LIFE"

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THE tragic ordeal which began for Madame Duez in the flower of womanhood was an experience which she refused to dwell upon, in any of the conversations I had with her. Only from a word here and there, from a phrase picked up now and then, could I piece together the somber pattern of those sorrowful years.

The grimdest years of all must have been those twelve years that began, with cataclysmic suddenness, with the pronouncement of the sentence upon her husband, on the twelfth day of November, 1910. Her whole world—her world of ease, or of luxury, of friends, of music, of laughter, and of bright hopes—all this tumbled with a crash that day. And from that day she vanishes, not again to be seen until those twelve years have come to an end. One knew where Duez was eating out his heart in loneliness: he was on Devil's Island. But where was she? Did she stay on in Paris, where she would hide herself in some attic lodging? In Paris, where a thousand malicious tongues would whisper as she passed, where false friends would cut her on the streets, where unfriendly eyes would stare at her wherever she might go? Or would she find in the old house in Orléans a sanctuary? But if one asked concerning those years, Madame Duez merely closed her lips the tighter. That had been her own ordeal; that chapter was closed. . . .

But one fact stood out clearly. The house on the rue Bonaparte was boarded up, the furniture and the collection of paintings sold,

to satisfy the court. Madame Duez dedicated her life to the task of securing her husband's restoration. For this she must have money. But Monsieur Duez had never thought to separate his wife's affairs from his own. Her dowry may have been a substantial one, but, since it was held in his name and he had now been deprived of the rights of citizenship, she could not make use of it—not while she remained his wife.

Heart-breaking alternative! She could help the man she loved only by declaring that she no longer wished to be his wife! There was no alternative. She began action for a divorce. Only as a *femme sole* could she prove her devotion to the man she was divorcing on the ground that he was a felon!

Wherever she spent them, the interminable years at last dragged themselves to an end. In March, 1922, sharing her husband's mistaken impression that his prison term would come to an end that month, she was ready to sail for Guiana, to join him. There had been no answer to the agonized appeals which he had addressed to the Government, for permission to return home. More, the Government chose this moment, when she was buoyed up by the hope that she would soon see him, to strike her the cruellest blow of all.

“As I was on the very eve of sailing,” she told me, “a member of the Chamber of Deputies put a question to the house: Why had Duez been left in Guiana? . . .

“Barthou, a member of the Government, mounted the speaker's stand to answer. At the top of his voice he shouted: ‘*Duez is dead!*’”

I saw Madame Duez tremble at the recollection of that awful moment. Indeed, I wondered how she had ever survived that shock. But she merely added sarcastically:

“You see, that was just a trick of theirs, that answer, to head

off embarrassing questions. The deputy took his seat, they turned to other matters. Ah, Barthou, you were certainly running true to form, that day! . . . But when I told my husband about it later, he observed drily, 'I'm surprised that they did not see to it that I was *actually* dead.' And, to my way of thinking, Nicol, if they had actually done away with him by violent means, it might have been less cruel; because the leaders of that period, elastic as their consciences were, could not possibly have imagined the suffering, moral and physical, which my husband endured in order to save *them*, the cowards!"

Madame Duez reached Cayenne on November 19, 1922, exactly a week after her husband walked out of the penitentiary gates—not as a man wholly free, but as a *libéré*. I can see him trudging, since he had no money to spend for a taxi, all the long way to the steamship pier. I see him standing there, his arms outstretched, tears trickling down his cheeks. . . .

"Was he greatly changed?" I asked.

Madame Duez sat silent for a long moment. "Nicol," she said at last, her voice trembling at the memory of that meeting, "I cannot describe the emotions with which I was torn, the emotions which I had to hide beneath a smile, when, after all those years, I saw him once more. When he left me, he was a man in the prime of life; and now before me stood a man already old, a man whose face was ravaged with deeply cut lines of suffering. With a tortured heart, I forced myself to say that I had recognized him instantly, that he wasn't changed a bit. And the truth was exactly the contrary. . . ."

She found a man whose spirit had broken, whose last hope had died, whose will to fight had gone. And without a momentary thought of the sufferings which she herself had undergone, she set herself to the task of rebuilding this man's courage and the will

to live. It was by her indomitable courage, and only through her, that Edmond Duez at last regained confidence that some day—and in the not distant future—he would be able to return to France.

They threw themselves into their task. The first necessity was to find a home in which to live. Their slender resources—in reality, only what money Madame Duez had been able to save, since Duez had been stripped of all his—were not enough to permit them to live comfortably in Cayenne, nor did they wish to remain in the city. Madame Duez insisted that a place must be found where her husband might have the benefit of sea breezes and country life. After exploring all the possibilities, they finally fixed upon the little island called The Mother, twelve miles south of Cayenne and three miles off the coast.

The Mother! I thought, as I sat listening to Madame Duez and watching her careworn face, that no name could have been more fitting. She and her husband were childless. But was she not to mother him now, as if he were a veritable child?

It was Madame Duez who had to attend to everything, for Duez had not the strength for anything. It was she who carried through all the negotiations for leasing the islet, she who arranged for everything, she who worked from dawn to dark in preparing its jungle acres for their occupancy. Doubtless the island had been named The Mother long before she ever came to it; but it was she who now gave beautiful meaning to its name.

No habitable house stood upon the island. The first thing to be done was to clear away the jungle vegetation for a site; the second, to build the house.

To do these things, laborers were required.

"Where could you find them, madame?" I asked wonderingly.

She looked at me in surprise. "Why, in what place but one

would I find them?" she asked. "I hired twenty-four convicts from the Isles de Salut."

Her tone was the most matter-of-fact imaginable.

"Twenty-four *convicts*!" I gasped. "You are not serious, Madame Duez!"

Madame Duez had brought her knitting with her, and was placidly counting stitches. "Twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four—purl two—why, yes, Nicol, we hired convicts. Why not?"

Thus answered, there was nothing I could say. It was true enough, everybody in Cayenne, every storekeeper and every house-wife, hired the ex-convicts, the *libérés*, to do any imaginable sort of job. Those with trades could pick up a living, those without picked up scraps on the streets. And, as in any collection of criminals, all sorts of specialists might be found. I myself knew an electrician, a taxidermist, and a taxicab driver. What Madame Duez needed, to begin with, were some woodcutters, two or three carpenters, and a house builder. She got them all, of course, along with a dozen or more common laborers to help out. I wasn't surprised that this should be so; what stuck in my throat was the characters of the lot. There wasn't in all Guiana an ex-convict who hadn't been sent there for at least seven years—which meant that not one of them was there for any petty misdemeanor. To the last man, they were thieves, robbers, rapists, firebugs, not to mention plenty of murderers. And this was the gang of twenty-four that this gentle white-haired lady, who had been shielded and sheltered from birth to womanhood, had hired to work for her on an island ten miles from nowhere! I would as soon have slept with twenty-four rattlesnakes.

I drew a long breath. I shook my head in sheer stupefaction. "But, madame—" I expostulated, staring at her with round eyes.

Madame Duez laughed. "Oh, it wasn't so bad as it sounds, my child," she said lightly. "You see, we had looked into all their

recent records, thoroughly, before we hired them. Don't forget, the prison officials all admired Monsieur Duez, and they all wanted to help him. They recommended absolutely reliable men. Bear in mind that we needed an army of that size only at the first, while the ground was being cleared off and the house was being built. After that, we kept only two or three—a cook, and two or three handymen who understood vegetable gardening. What did we need of more?"

That was true. I didn't realize it so completely then as I did when I saw the house, later. It is not a large house. It consisted of three large rooms only, which were occupied by Monsieur and Madame, and two smaller ones in wings at the rear.

"I quite understand," I murmured. "Three or four murderers ought to be enough for anybody."

But Madame Duez did not hear me, or affected not to.

"I must say," she added, "my husband didn't want to have them at all. He was afraid that if it was necessary for him to rebuke them for laziness, or any small fault, they would probably retort with foul language, which would not be fit for my ears." She smiled. "But I told him I wouldn't have any difficulty with them, so he finally gave in and let me manage these twenty-four jailbirds in my own way. They were really no trouble at all. After all, most of them are just great big children whom anything offends and the least little thing upsets. And I must say, frankly, they are not so 'lost' as people are ready to believe. I found that every single one of these men had a soft spot in his heart and it was only necessary to recognize it in order to win him over.

"Being inquisitive, that is to say being a true daughter of Eve, I questioned them bit by bit and each one of them opened up and told me just how he had come to be sent to prison. Alas! Most of the time, it was for a pretty small thing that a man's life had been spoiled!"

"Do you remember any of their stories?" I asked.

"Why, of course! One of them, for example, had been sent to jail just for this: When he was a youngster, he was going through his term of military training, which every boy must have. One night he had a bit too much to drink and fell asleep by a haystack, with a cigarette in his lips. The cigarette set the haystack afire, and he was charged with malicious arson. Dishonorable discharge and sentence to prison! Is it not dreadful, thus to throw into the mire the son of an honest family? The boy, knowing that he had dishonored his family, tried to escape, was caught, convicted again; at the first opportunity he tried again to escape from the prison, and was again caught. And his great crime? He had set fire to a haystack!

"Let me give you another example: One of these young fellows who worked for me first got into trouble when he was only thirteen years old, a mere child! He stole some boxes of American marmalade. His parents felt obliged to send him to a reformatory, but he escaped from it and came back home, to work for his father. One night he was so unlucky to be found with a gang who were planning a robbery, and although he knew absolutely nothing about it, he was arrested. Too young to defend himself, at the age of eighteen he was sentenced to serve seven years in the penitentiary. That automatically sent him to Guiana.

"Far be it from me to give absolution to all of them; but, truly, Justice, which is so merciful to certain persons, should have been extended to that man whom they did not hesitate to throw into the mire without compunction or fear of retribution!"

I knew only too well what terrible memories were in Madame Duez' mind as she uttered those words. But she went on, still speaking of the wretched outcasts of society whom she had pitied and helped.



THE HOUSE BUILT BY MADAME DUEZ, WITH THE HELP OF CONVICTS



MOST OF THEM WERE JUST GREAT  
BIG CHILDREN



THE WOODS THIN OUT A LITTLE, SO THAT ONE HAS A VIEW OF THE BLUE SEA

“I think it would be such a simple thing to reform men like these, and to bring them back to the good path!” she cried, her face glowing with earnestness. “Of course, they are hotheads, and the evil of the prison brings this out even more. Those who have newly arrived find themselves, sooner or later, contaminated by ‘the old ones’—and a careful study would have to be made to decide which of these big children are not ‘lost’ and can be led back to good.”

I was still almost speechless, lost in amazement at the picture which this quiet-voiced woman had conjured up—a tiny tropical island, remote from outside aid, dominated by one gentle mistress whose retainers were a score of released criminals! I tried to think of something to say. There wasn’t anything that I could say.

“Well, what did they think of you, for their part?” I managed to stammer.

Madame Duez reflected, and smiled reminiscently. “They had a nickname for me,” she confided. “It wasn’t malicious, I assure you. I hadn’t thought of it for years, but, now that you ask me, I remember it. Do you want to know what they called me? It was ‘Mother Tape-Dur.’”

“‘Mother Tape-Dur?’” I exclaimed, puzzled. “*Tape dur*—that means ‘a violent slap,’ doesn’t it? Why on earth should they call you ‘Mother Slap-Hard?’”

“Oh, they didn’t mean anything by it,” Madame Duez assured me quickly. “It was just in fun. They just used it to make me laugh, bless them.”

And nothing that I could say would make her explain that nickname further.

In 1941, I was told an odd tale by a ragged *libéré* whom I encountered on the streets of Cayenne. He had been reminiscing

of one thing and another, and in the course of his rambling gossip he had got onto the subject of feminine timidity.

Women, he asserted roundly, had no more courage than a mouse. Why, even a mouse could frighten them! And then he stopped himself, and an admiring smile stole slowly over his unshaven features.

"No, I'll take that back!" he exclaimed. "I knew an exception, though maybe that just proves the rule. . . . She was a good soul, that woman, and she had the heart of a lion. A lioness, that's what she was! Do you know what she once did? I'll tell you: She had hired a lot of us boys to do some work for her. You see, she had an island, off the coast here, that needed a lot of fixing up. She took us over there in a boat. Well, now, I must confess, there were one or two pretty bad eggs among us, for a fact. There's no getting away from that. I myself wouldn't have cared to tangle with one of those lads. I kept my eyes wide open, even when I slept, I don't mind telling you. There were some who would just as soon have slit your throat as not. . . . But do you suppose that old girl let that worry her for a moment? Not at all! She went about, calm as you please, with a smile for everybody; and it was no time before every last one of us would have died for her, if she had so much as lifted a finger to ask it. *Mon dieu*, she was like a mother to us, do you understand? And when a man has gone through life as we had, kicked around like dogs in a gutter—well, never mind, let's forget that part of it!"

He paused to rub his eyes with a corner of his dirty sleeve, gulped, and went on:

"Well, as I say, that was the way all of us felt. She was as safe as if she had been surrounded by a king's guard. That was true of all of us—all except one.

"He was—well, I'll tell you how it was with him. He was a

fellow who had been shipped over here because he was a beast. With women, do you understand? To name it, rape. He had done his time, no fear. Well, he had behaved himself fairly well while he was serving it, and as he was a big husky fellow, just the man for the heavy work to be done on the island, he was among those who were hired. And everything went quietly enough, for a time. . . .

"But he must have been watching his chance, this dog.

"Somehow or other, this fine woman—we all called her 'Mother,' do you see?—started off one day to explore the island all by herself. She shouldn't have done so, of course. We usually kept an eye on her. But this time she slipped off without anyone noticing. And she took the path that follows the shore line. It runs along the edge of the low cliff that rises from the sea, but the big trees and the underbrush are on both sides of it, most of the way. And this fellow was in there, cutting away some of the timber, not far from the house.

"Well, she came along the path, and saw him, and stopped to give him a pleasant word, such as she had for everybody, and then she went on. She came to a point where the woods thinned out a little, so that one has a view of the blue sea, and she stopped to rest herself and to feast her eyes on that view. She was standing right at the edge of the embankment above the beach.

"She heard a rustle in the bushes, and this fellow stepped out. He came toward her. I suppose she was the first woman with whom he had ever found himself alone in years. And he was no longer a man, he was an animal.

"She looked at him, as he took a step toward her, and she never turned a hair. 'Now, my son, go back to your work,' she said calmly, not even raising her voice.

"He leaped at her. And do you know what she did, m'sieu?

She lifted her hand, and swung it, and slapped his face! *Nom d'un nom*, what a slap that was! It spun him around on his feet, he slipped, and fell head over heels, right down the cliff, into the sea!

"She walked back to the house, without hurrying herself a bit, mind you, and told some of us we had better go haul him out—he had fallen into the tide, by accident, and was clinging to a rock, she said.

"Well, you can guess what we called her after that, m'sieu. We called her *la Mère Tape-Dur*, Mother Slap-Hard. What do you call it in America, m'sieu, when one boxer floors another with one punch? The knock-out? Yes, that is it, the *kayo*! Mother *Kayo*! Believe me, she could take care of herself, that one!"

And he chuckled in huge delight.

Life in the new house began for Madame Duez and her husband early in 1923. The spacious low bungalow faced on a small meadow, with the great breadfruit trees flanking it on three sides, and from its long shaded veranda one looked out over the blue sea. One might imagine that in the beauty of these tropical surroundings life would have been one long dream of paradise. There were moments of happiness, it is true; but when I asked Madame Duez to tell me of her life on the island she told me truthfully of the bitter mingled with the sweet.

"Yes," she murmured, her eyes misty with the recollection of things past, "there on that island, I thought, far away from all the world, how quiet and how tranquil we would be, we two! Ah, well, we were disillusioned!

"Remote as we were from them, the people of Cayenne did not take kindly to our coming. From time to time, in order to eke out the scanty funds we had to live on, I would take such produce as we had raised on our farm, and, crossing over to the mainland by

boat, would offer it for sale in the market at Cayenne. I used to hear the natives there sneering at us, whispering as I passed, and doubtless meaning me to overhear: 'Ah, here comes the lady from the islet! They are not making a go of it; they must eat all their pennies!' Or, from the people who were better off than we were, this sort of thing: 'Two more who have come here to take the bread out of our mouths!' Yes, human nature is so petty, so lacking in generosity, that nothing pleases such souls so much as to hear that people who are struggling to make a living are not succeeding, or that this or that venture has failed. One thing you may count upon, from such persons—all the difficulty that can be heaped in the path of those who undertake anything, those who are struggling to show a little profit from their enterprise, day by day. Against all these snares, all these obstacles which were thrown in our way, all we could earn was disgust and disappointment; and all this contributed to the great satisfaction of the natives. This was what one had to face, if forced as we were to live beneath the sun of Guiana, in order to survive thirteen years of it.

"Today I am left alone, with the intense hope that I shall soon be able to depart, taking from this accursed country a thoroughly wretched impression of the mentality of all its people. Even the Europeans here are jealous of each other, and behind their smiles spread poison; they conceal the most perverse ideas.

"And you ask what my life was like? Well, it was a life of hard work, surrounded by jailbirds. Although, to give them their due, the jailbirds were no worse than others. . . .

"And, by the way, I must tell you a little story about those men, something that I shall never forget. Would you like to hear it?"

"Of course!" I cried. Madame Duez' face was shining as she continued:

"Well, this happened soon after we came to the island. In

digging in my garden one day, I was bitten by a poisonous centipede. I had to be taken promptly, in our little sailboat, to the mainland, for an operation at the hospital in Cayenne. Well, those twenty-four big children were desolate. They didn't want to see me go. I was kept in the hospital for six weeks; and during all that time, knowing that nothing would please me better, they vied with each other in trying to give full satisfaction to Monsieur Duez, for whom, indeed, they never ceased to have the greatest respect.

"Finally, at the end of the six weeks, old Mother Slap-Hard came home. I wish you might have seen that homecoming, Nicol! The vessel which brought me back, a little coastwise steamer, could not get up to the landing pier, having arrived at low tide; and so a rowboat was sent out to meet me. Everyone of those boys who could get into it, crowded into the little boat. And, let me tell you, when I came down the ladder and saw all those friendly hands reaching up toward me, I cried out, to hide my emotion and the hammering of my heart:

" 'But whom are you expecting, besides me?'

"Because, I forgot to say, this little boat had the flag of France fluttering from bow and stern, a thing which made me ask:

" 'Are you expecting the President of France?'

"Well, that was one thing that warmed the heart. And for another——"

Madame Duez hesitated. Her voice faltered. Then she went on, bravely:

"After my return from the hospital, my husband suggested to me the idea that we ought to adopt a child, some child that had been abandoned by his mother. That happens almost every day, you know, in Cayenne. And so we made inquiries and had the good luck to find a charming little boy, lively, and healthy, al-

though already a little soiled by Cayenne. After he had told us that he would be happy to come to us, I brought him to Mother Island.

"But, oh, how difficult it was to remake the education of that little one! It was all the more difficult because he had already learned everything about life—and he was just eight years old!

"I took all the pains in the world to turn this small boy away from all the evil in life, but I confess I was secretly amused by the question he asked me one day. 'Madame,' he asked, 'do you know Madame X——, in Cayenne?' 'No, my boy,' I replied. 'I do not see much of the world of Cayenne.' 'Well, you ought to know her,' he said very seriously. 'This Madame X——, she has a new baby every month!'

"I didn't have the heart to disillusion him.

"Deep down in my heart, I was well satisfied with my efforts to bring the boy up properly. Little by little, I changed him. This child, who had never been taught how to pray, now neither woke up nor went to bed without first offering his heart to God. But during the first month he was with us, there had been several occasions when I had had to interrupt his prayers, when he wanted to ask God to bless me, his 'mother.' He always prayed for 'Monsieur' and 'Madam' as if we were his real parents. And when I tried to make him understand that I was only his stepmother, this child threw himself into my arms and persisted in saying: 'It is you, madame, who are my real mother, because it is you who makes me happy!'

"Alas! This little one, who was too innocent to live in this world, was taken from us in his thirteenth year. He had gone fishing, and was drowned, together with his companion, a man sixty-five years old. To describe our sorrow at that time is impossible. It was the gaiety which he had spread around him that had

made us feel young; and his loss added ten years to our age."

Madame Duez, at my urging, once wrote out for me an account of the manner in which her days were filled, during the ten years she spent on the island. To hear her tell of what she did, you would have thought she had done nothing at all remarkable. She made little of it. But when one reflects upon her background, when one remembers that she entered upon this life which was little less arduous than life in the raw jungle, and came to it from a social station in Paris which had lapped her in luxury, one is astounded by her courage, her pluck, her unhesitating acceptance of privations and hardships. This is what she told me:

"I may say that on Mother Island I did whatever sort of work that was called for; and at present I know more than one trade. For example:

"1. *Cooking.* When I arrived, I did not even know how to make onion soup. Today, I am *cordon bleu*—a master chef!

"2. *Farming.* I always liked to take care of animals, and when I saw myself surrounded, there on our island, with all my farm cattle, I was happier than I had ever been in the company of a good many people I might name.

"3. *Fishing.* Almost daily I went fishing off shore, with two fishermen to man our little boat. In good weather, with a calm sea, it is perfect. But when this same sea is on its bad behavior it can be very disagreeable indeed. Many is the time I have asked myself how I could have had the hardihood to venture out in a toy boat, no larger than a walnut shell upon that vast immensity. How often, caught by the storm, have I had to jump into the sea in order to reach the shore! When I was young, if anyone had told me that one day I should do such feats as this, I would have refused to believe them.

"4. *Gardening.* Ah, it is indeed an art to make carrots and

turnips grow here—in a word, all, or nearly all, of the vegetables that go into a good French soup!

“But what a triumph, when one has a good harvest! Upon my word, I was as proud to be able to carry a basket of vegetables, grown in my own garden, as I would have been to carry in my arms the most beautiful roses of France! My self-esteem increased in exact proportion to the degree to which we planted that island, and I don’t mind saying it was we who planted everything.

“5. *Dressmaking*. Yes, that’s right—*‘cou-tur-ière’*! Oh, well, one’s toilet on the island was never complicated, and but for a difference in colors all my dresses were alike—all made from the same pattern, and a very simple pattern at that: One hole for the head; two for the arms; a seam on each side (very much like a flour sack!) and, to add a final touch, a ruffle or two at the hem of the skirt!

“But, bah! With a little powder on one’s nose, to repair the irreparable outrages of the years, and, so far as I was concerned, this was quite good enough for the country.

“As for hats—well, just the broad-brimmed straw hat the convicts wear, and, for a trip into town, a close-fitting cap.

“Luckily, with such an equipment, I was never called upon to supply ideas to the big dressmaking establishments and the big dress-designers of Paris! Otherwise—it would have been just too bad!”

“No old journalistic friend of ours ever visited Guiana without making a trip to our island; and I am proud to say that not one of them, on his return to France, ever failed to sing the praises of Monsieur Duez. Because everybody in France knew what it was all about, and hardly anyone ever pronounced the name Duez without evoking that of Millerand. . . .”

In these words she began the final scene.

Her hatred of the men whom she believed responsible for his tragedy was her dominating passion. There was a smoldering in her deepset eyes which did not bode well for them in this world or the next.

Madame Duez, on first arriving in Guiana, had succeeded in restoring to her husband, heartsick and defeated as she found him, new courage and new hope. As his physical strength slowly came back, with the simple life in the open air, so her indomitable courage and belief in him slowly built up his belief that all would yet be well with him, and that one day he would be allowed to realize his dearest dream—return to France, to rest at last in her beloved soil. The deep satisfaction of their reunion was lighted up by this hope.

And that hope was fanned, from time to time, by the letters of encouragement and sympathy which they received from their friends in France, who kept on the fight in Duez' behalf. Madame Duez told me of a bit of humor that came to their ears from across the Atlantic—a jest which some unknown friend of theirs had aimed at Millerand, and which must have made all Paris chuckle behind the back of that statesman.

Millerand, who had been elected to the Presidency of the Republic in 1920—the tenth year which Duez had spent on Devil's Island—and who had retained that post until the summer of 1924, announced himself three years later as a candidate for the Senate, from the Department of the Seine. He was defeated. Nothing daunted, in the same year he got himself nominated to represent the Department of the Orne, and this time won his Senate seat, though, as friends wrote to Madame Duez, by a majority of three votes only. These friends went on to inform her that someone had nominated Edmond Duez upon a rival ticket. Duez, the prisoner of Devil's Island, received eighty-five votes! On the morning following the elections, said Madame Duez, one of the leading daily

papers of Paris carried on its *manchette*, the tidy little wrapper worn by French newspapers when delivered to subscribers, this mocking inscription:

“Who does not remember the Affair of the Congregations, when Millerand was sent to the penitentiary and Duez was named President of the Republic?”

Bitter as the joke directed at Millerand was, and though Duez might have smiled a wry smile at its ironic shaft, the jest might have been not without its stab for him, still chained to his island exile, while Millerand strutted in the Senate! But still, the eighty-five votes showed that Duez had his friends, and that they had not forgotten him. . . .

But four more years dragged on, and still no pardon had been wrung from the inexorable east. Duez was seventy-three years old now, a man nearing his end. In that summer of 1931, a newspaper reached the island. He opened it, saw a headline, and dropped the paper from his shaking hands. It told of the death of Fallières, who had been President of France when Duez was beginning his work. How long ago that seemed!

In October of 1932, a letter came. The envelope bore the official seal of the highest court in France. Pardon at last! Madame Duez scarcely breathed as she tore it open.

It contained, instead of pardon, the cold announcement that Edmond Duez must serve out his sentence to the letter. He had been sentenced on November 12, 1910; the twelve-year sentence, doubled, would not expire until 1934.

Duez sat looking out at the sea, silent. The slender thread of hope to which he had clung had snapped. He had no longer the resistance with which to meet this final shock.

On the twenty-first of November, 1932, Edmond Duez breathed his last. His wife sat by him.

It had been twenty-two years, almost to the day, since sentence

had been passed upon him. Not for one moment, in all those years, had she ever lost faith in him nor ceased to fight his tragic battle.

The courageous woman who had resolutely crushed down her own feelings, her own discouragement, while she built up a broken man, who had held back her tears when the child whom she adopted was torn from her, sank beneath this final blow and the long strain of the nightmare years. For months she lay between life and death.

Even after she at last won through that ordeal she remained dazed by the blow that brought death to her husband. That he was not even to be permitted to die on the soil of France was a last cruelty of which she had never dreamed. It had been, and still was, incredible to her that the guilty ones, back there in Paris, should be living as they were, even admired and honored, while she and her husband paid this infamous price. Like a refrain through the strophes of the iron-tolling years, came her heart's rebellious bitter cry against the men responsible for the ruin of her husband's life.

When I first saw her, in 1934, she had not long recovered from the siege of illness which had followed upon her husband's death. Unable to contemplate a future spent upon the island, where every scene would remind her of her lost companion, she had left the house to a caretaker and had come to Cayenne to wait there until she could sell the island and return to France.

Not long after I met her, she placed in my hands a little notebook, bound in shiny black, like the cheap notebooks children carry to school. Its pages were filled with the neat handwriting taught in the young ladies' finishing schools of France two generations ago.

"I want you to take this, Nicol," she said, her wrinkled hands patting mine. "Read it, and perhaps you will tell the people of America, who love justice, what it is to seek, with all your soul, for justice and to find no answer to your cries."



*Photograph by Rene Belbenoit, 1932*

EDMOND DURZ BREATHED HIS LAST. HIS WIFE SAT BESIDE HIM

# La fin de ma vie. -

Après avoir été un peu heureuse dans ma jeunesse, je me suis, au déclin de ma vie, dans un passage des plus difficiles

mon mari, Monsieur Edouard Duez, m'a fait promettre, que les heures avant sa mort, de la venger, c'est à-dire de faire connaître par les mémoires, l'injustice des gouvernements au moment de sa condamnation..

## The First Page

## The Final Page

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mai à qui bon !

L'abbé le regardait, il arrivait à gravir le chemin et souhaitait qu'au moins il n'ait pas à regretter son manque de monnaie et l'en aborder, avec un homme qui fait du bon, lorsque ils auront à paraître devant le Grand Juge !

J. Duez - *Paris*

At the top of the first page of the manuscript she had written, *The End of My Life*. It began with these words:

After having been in my girlhood as happy as it is possible to be, I came, at the end of my life, into a time of grievous trial.

A few hours before his death, my husband, Edmond Duez, made me promise that I would avenge him: that is to say, I would make known through these memoirs the injustice of the Government of France at the time of his conviction.

I had not then realized the full significance of that word "injustice," because, unhappily, at that actual moment we had yet to prove the dishonesty of the greater number of those men who had been our directors.

And the most painful thing of all is that those who had so grossly stolen the savings of a lifetime were left wholly undisturbed, or, in the event they were convicted, escaped with extremely light punishment.

Therefore, in view of the severity shown by the judges toward M. Duez, I have decided to make known to all the world the incompetence and bad faith of the men who, in 1910, headed the Government of France.

"Incompetence"? Yes, because those who condemned their victim to twelve years in prison completely ignored the fact that such a sentence, for such a number of years, to all intents and purposes actually condemned him to remain in Guiana, the land of expiation, *for the rest of his life!*

"Bad faith"? Yes, because these same persons who convicted him of "frauds" were never able to show what "frauds" my husband had committed. Moreover, never—emphatically never!—was any proof ever produced, for the good reason that *there was none to produce*.

To this I say: They needed someone's head for the platter, and it was his head which had been chosen.

In fact, on the twelfth day of November, 1910, the court sitting to try Duez exclaimed: "But the most guilty are not here! Against Duez, there is no evidence worthy of consideration!"

At the end of her narrative she wrote these words:

"And now that the cell of Edmond Duez is empty, to what other 'guilty' one will they give it? Who will it be who will replace him? Ah! about this latter, I am quite at ease: nobody will come; because, I am very much afraid, none of all these consciences will reproach themselves with anything. . . .

"Therefore I say, and others ask this with me: Why were they so severe with a man whose one error, compared to the great wrongs and thefts which did not cease to be committed even after his incarceration, was no crime at all?

"And for the second time I say: *Alas, poor France!*

"And I repeat: What punishment are they going to inflict upon the actual leaders?

\* \* \*

"Take care, Millerand! For even if the justice of men is merciful to you, that of God will be terrible, in that moment when you are arraigned before Him!

"My only consolation now is the hope that soon I shall be able to rejoin and to walk beside him who was so unhappy upon earth, because of the machinations of an ambitious one, a coward—a coward who had not the courage to bring back from the land of exile him who had gone there in his stead; the coward who, at the moment of his elevation to the Presidency, should have remembered the victim whom he had abandoned to be condemned to the penitentiary. . . .

"As for the rest, not one of those others to whom Edmond Duez gave his loyalty ever gave him so much as a thought.

"Where are the times when, at the receptions at the Elysée, Duez was invited to sit at table at the right of the President?

"Where are the times when Lémery, Senator from Martinique, came to Duez for help, after the catastrophe at St. Pierre?

"Ah, how many more wrongs I could still recite! But to what good? Let us leave the ingrates, the opportunists, to crawl on their bellies along their own paths. And let us wish that no one of them have regret for his lack of gratitude and for his desertion of a man who was so good, on the day when they go to appear before the Supreme Judge!

"I. DUEZ-PERRONNET."

When I returned to Guiana, after an absence of seven years, I sought immediately to find Madame Duez. And my first question brought an answer that saddened me: Madame Duez had left Guiana, never to return! She had sailed, announcing that she was returning to France; but the Governor himself informed me that some time after her departure, an occasion arising when it was desired to communicate with her, a search had been made for her in France without any clue to her whereabouts being discovered. It was assumed that she was dead.

Nevertheless, the little island off the coast, where she had struggled indomitably to bring happiness to all she loved and on which her heart at last had been broken, drew me to it. It was as though her voice called me there.

The Mother's Island. . . .

I stood looking at the house which she had built with such faith and hope. At one end, the porch roof sagged crazily. The walls had once been painted, but the tropical sun had taken its toll, and the house looked shabby and gray, like an old man who had come

to the end of his strength. I peered indoors. The woodwork of the interior had once been painted, but here, too, there was an air of mustiness and a look of dilapidation. In one room there had been an attempt at decoration, wall borders of pastel shades; but these were now moldy and chipped with cracks which afforded sanctuary for hundreds of mosquitoes. The house was filled with them. There were no screens. Behind the house, pigs grunted in their muddy pens.

But the great trees overhead and the blue sea were very beautiful. It was good to think that even the house had been beautiful, when Madame Duez lived in it and filled it with her love.

THE END









